

POLK COUNTY/DES MOINES, IOWA

# COORDINATED COMMUNITY PLAN



TO PREVENT AND END YOUTH  
HOMELESSNESS

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2020



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**SECTION 1**

**THE NEED  
IN OUR  
COMMUNITY**



*Art by Polk County Youth Action Council Member*



## INTRODUCTION

Polk County, Iowa is a community in the heart of the nation with an overall population of 487,204. It's also a county on the rise, experiencing an estimated 13% growth in population since 2010 according to the 2018 Census estimate. Though Polk County is a majority white community (77% of the population), there is a diverse array of individuals who call Central Iowa home. Black or African American individuals represent 7% of the county's makeup, just over 8% are Hispanic/Latino, and 5% are Asian. As the largest metro area and the capital of Iowa, Des Moines serves as Polk County's urban hub and as the location for many of the county's shelters, supports, and homelessness resources. Beyond the metro area, the Polk County community is also inclusive of suburban and rural areas, many of which are smaller towns and population centers.

The estimated 9.4% of Polk County residents between the ages of 18-24 ("U.S. Census Bureau," 2018) find themselves at a crucial stage in their social, intellectual, and emotional development. These young people have the potential to become the future leaders of our Polk County community— but only if we support them with the resources they need to achieve safe, stable housing, access education and employment, and receive social/emotional support. Unfortunately these resources are not a given for many young people. Nationally, 1 in 10 young adults ages 18 to 25 endure some form of homelessness in a year (Dworsky & Horwitz, 2018). This experience of youth homelessness contains complex, often interrelated factors that differ from the experience of adult homelessness. Thus, as a community, we have a responsibility to identify the unique needs and strengths of youth experiencing housing instability and better design our systems to create safety and stability. As stated in the Chapin Hall Voices of Youth Count, "Adolescence and young adulthood represent a key developmental window. Every day of housing instability and the associated stress in the lives of young people... represents missed opportunities to support healthy development and transitions to productive adulthood,"(Dworsky & Horwitz, 2018). For Polk County to truly thrive, it's crucial that we examine these missed opportunities to develop housing structures, supports, and resources that provide youth with the tools they need to succeed.

## SCOPE OF HOMELESSNESS IN POLK COUNTY

In the 2007 Point in Time (PIT) Count, 1,041 individuals were experiencing homelessness in Polk County. Just over a decade later, in 2018, that number had decreased to 764 individuals experiencing homelessness. While there was a marked decline in the overall homeless numbers in our community, some of our most vulnerable populations are trending in the opposite direction. For instance, the number of unsheltered individuals grew slightly by 5% over the last decade. Though these PIT count numbers are a limited snapshot of one



day in Polk County, the change over time does help to view trends and establish plans for the future of our homeless response system.

These numbers also help understand the ways the Polk County community serves its residents experiencing homelessness. While the County has made notable progress over the decade in serving families (337 people in families were homeless during the 2007 PIT in comparison to 152 in 2018), the number of homeless individuals in Polk County has not decreased as rapidly. For instance, the 2007 PIT count identified 704 homeless individuals. Over 10 years later, that number has only fallen to 612 individuals experiencing homelessness in 2018. This discrepancy may point to the success of family-based services and interventions in our community, but highlights the need for additional resources for individuals experiencing homelessness in Polk County.

We also know that data does not tell the whole story of the scope of homelessness in Polk County. It's crucial that our community partner with individuals with lived experience, create inclusive programs and services, and evaluate tracking methods to enact a better homeless response system for all. By making concerted efforts to reach families and individuals who have traditionally flown under the radar, Polk County can create a network to serve our community's most vulnerable populations-- including youth and young adults.

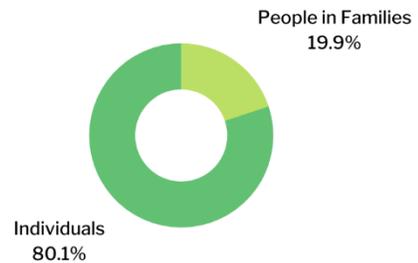
**2007 PIT COUNT**

1,041 Total



**2018 PIT COUNT**

764 Total



**UNACCOMPANIED YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS**

Additional services, interventions, and supports are especially crucial for one population of Polk County residents: youth and young adults experiencing homelessness. In 2018-2019, the Polk County Continuum of Care served 707 Transitional Aged Youth (TAY) ages 18-24. Of these, 46% of TAY were female, 52% were male, with the remaining individuals identifying as transgender or gender non-conforming (HMIS 2018-2019). Most of the individuals had a prior living situation of staying with family or friends, in emergency shelter, or in a place not meant for habitation.



In terms of demographic breakdown, of the Polk County young people in the HMIS in 2018-2019, 58% were white 38% and were Black/African American (38%). Just as in the overall homeless response system, Black/African American youth are disproportionately over-represented in the homeless population in Polk County compared to their overall population of 7% in the county. These statistics about our unaccompanied youth inform our YHDP work as we move forward as a community to create systems and programs that better serve the strengths and needs of young people.

### **AT-RISK UNACCOMPANIED YOUTH**

We know that there are likely many additional young people struggling with housing insecurity in Polk County beyond the literal definition of homelessness. For instance, young adults who are couch surfing, doubled up, and are living in extreme poverty are at imminent risk of homelessness. Our community is also comprised of youth who are disconnected from work, school, and/or their broader community, putting them at risk for future housing instability. These Transition Aged Youth report experiencing academic challenges, language barriers, poverty, family disruptions, foster care or juvenile justice involvement, early parenting, structural racism, mental health problems, and disabilities as just some of the barriers to achieving and maintaining safe, stable housing.

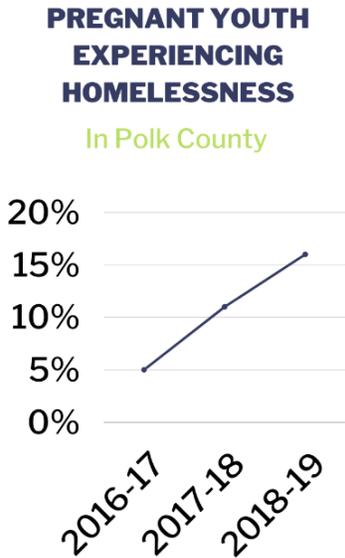
While these “at-risk” individuals can be harder to quantify, it’s just as crucial that we identify the young people in our community who are unaccompanied and close to experiencing homelessness. In Polk County, 1,278 youth fit this category based on statistics from the Iowa Department of Education. This large number of young people is a crucial focus for our community’s YHDP work as we work to further early identification and interventions strategies. By building a robust network of prevention and diversion programming as well as the creation of new youth-specific housing and supportive services projects, we can truly work to end homelessness—and even prevent it from happening at all for the young people at-risk in our community.

### **PREGNANT OR PARENTING YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS**

For the 162 youth that are pregnant and/or parenting while experiencing homelessness, additional supports and resources are necessary to reach housing stability. In Polk County during 2018-2019, RHY data reveals that 16% of young women experiencing homelessness were pregnant, an increase from 2017-2018 (11%) and over double the number reported in 2016-17 (5%). This population of young people has additional challenges to accessing services and programs to fit their needs. Repeated traumatic events can serve as a barrier for families to access resources, participate in services, and form trusting relationships, thus



presenting serious risks to children’s and parents’ functioning and well-being. Compounding this are the usual stresses of childrearing and the incredible challenge of homelessness— an enormous burden for a young parent to carry.



In terms of housing resources for young families, Polk County has few family shelters and typically has 100 or more families on the waiting list. When family shelters are full, families who are literally homeless must make difficult choices about separating their families—perhaps taking their child to a youth shelter while the parent stays at an adult shelter. Too few housing options are available to families as they may not qualify for housing assistance or cannot find a home they can afford that meets their needs.

As a community, we must ensure that we’re ready to meet the complex needs of pregnant and parenting young people. By investing in affordable multi-room housing options and increasing access to education, employment, and early childhood care, we can ensure that pregnant and parenting Polk County youth have the resources they need to succeed. Both early childhood and housing providers must be culturally and linguistically competent to serve families from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences in our community. We also must better connect families to services to meet the early developmental needs of children such as access to high-quality child care, Early Access, Early Head Start, Head Start, preschool, or home visiting services.

**AT-RISK PREGNANT OR PARENTING YOUTH**

One of the most vulnerable populations of youth in Polk County is the approximately 78 youth who are pregnant or parenting and are at-risk of experiencing homelessness according to the Young Women’s Resource Center. Unmarried parenting youth had a 200% higher risk of being homeless (“Missed Opportunities,” 2018) making them a top priority to identify, serve, and prevent their entrance into the homeless management system.

Pregnant women experiencing homelessness are less likely to receive adequate prenatal care than housed mothers and their children are at increased risk for low birth weight, which can negatively influence a child’s cognitive, physical, and social-emotional development. Experiences of homelessness and housing instability in early childhood are also associated



with delays in children’s language, literacy, and social-emotional development (“Missed Opportunities,” 2018). Thus, YHDP efforts must allocate resources and programming to serve young parents and families at-risk of experiencing homelessness. Through analysis of our current system and by learning from the voices of our parenting youth and stakeholders, we can establish additional interventions and support to meet the specific needs and strengths of these young people in our community.

## HOUSING NEEDS

The economic structures of Polk County housing options create inequity, and thus lay the groundwork for homelessness in our community. Of Iowa renters, 44% are officially “housing burdened,” meaning that they spend more than 30% of their household income on rent (ALICE Report, United Way). An even more extreme indicator is highlighted by Greater Des Moines Habitat for Humanity which states that 1 in 8 Polk County households spend more than half their income on housing. These measures point to a lack of affordable housing in our community, and the true burden of renting or owning a home in the county, leaving many residents at risk for housing instability and homelessness.

Though the county contains an ever-growing number of luxury apartment buildings, subdivisions, and other high-end housing options, residents haven’t seen the same commitment to building low-income housing units. In fact, it’s estimated that Polk County is short at least 11,000 affordable housing units (Greater Des Moines Habitat for Humanity). This housing crisis has a disproportionate impact on youth, who often struggle with low paying jobs or entry-level wages. Data shows us that for these young people making minimum wage, independently renting housing simply isn’t an option in our community. Youth making \$7.25/hour would have to work 78 hours a week to afford a one bedroom apartment at the Fair Market Rate. Naturally, the burden for a 2 bedroom apartment is even higher. To afford a 2 bedroom apartment in Polk County, a young person would have to work the equivalent of 2.4 jobs at minimum wage. (National Low Income Housing Coalition).

This lack of affordable housing often leads youth to experience homelessness due to financial hardship, rent burdens, and eviction. However, the limitations of Polk County housing also make it difficult for youth to exit homelessness to a rental of their own. As our community continues to advocate for more affordable housing choices, additional options are needed for youth and young adults. By providing clear avenues of housing and services for youth, Polk County can ensure our most vulnerable residents have access to safe housing options for long-term stability.



## EDUCATION NEEDS

Beyond affordable housing options, Polk County youth require educational opportunities to achieve stability and success in our community. The Measure of America Youth Disconnection study shows that 9.7 % of Polk County youth are disconnected, meaning a sizable portion of our community’s youth between the ages of 16 and 24 are not in school or working. This rate is higher in our community than in the state of Iowa overall where 7% of Iowa youth are deemed disconnected. While the national disconnection rate is on the decline overall, young people of color experience greater rates of disconnection. Native American, Black, and Latinx youth all have higher disconnection rates than white and Asian youth. This disparity means Polk County youth of color have less access to educational and career opportunities, and thus are at a greater risk for experiencing homelessness.

Just as with youth of color, the community requires efforts to create equitable educational opportunities for another subpopulation: youth who are pregnant and/or parenting. These young people face overwhelming burdens on their time, finances, and emotional energy that often makes education difficult or impossible. In fact, an estimated 50% of adolescent mothers receive a high school diploma by 22 years of age, whereas about 90% of women who do not give birth during their adolescence graduate from high school (Perper, Peterson, & Manlove, 2010). As a community, it’s our role to step in quickly for pregnant and parenting youth with necessary programming, supports, and accommodations to connect youth with education, housing, and career opportunities. With a high school degree and opportunities for further study or development, Polk County youth are much more likely to achieve pathways to stable housing and long-term success.

## EMPLOYMENT NEEDS

Currently, 1 in 5 young people live in poverty in the United States (Price et al., 2019). Youth and young adults are naturally impacted by the complex economic structures of life in Polk County. As in so many American communities, Polk County residents struggle to make ends meet. According to 2018 Census data, the county’s official poverty rate is 9.9% (“U.S. Census Bureau,” 2018). However, many more individuals and families beyond that 10% battle with a lack of sustainable income and overwhelming expenses. As the United Way reports, over 450,000 Iowa households —37% —struggle to afford basic household expenses. For Polk County residents, this economic burden is tied to every facet of life including housing, food, health, education, and notably, career opportunities.

Though the Polk County unemployment rate of 2.6% is lower than both the state and national rate, (Iowa Workforce Development) it’s difficult for many individuals to find sustainable work that pays enough to maintain housing, food, and other costs. In 2018,



66% of all Iowa jobs paid less than \$20 per hour. Although unemployment rates fell, wages remained low for many occupations (ALICE Report, United Way). This is especially true for Polk County residents of color. The unemployment rate for African Americans in Polk County is 16% (“One Economy,” 2017) roughly 14% higher than the overall unemployment rate. Naturally, this gap in employment manifests in a gap in income. Polk County per capita (mean) income is \$33,524 (“U.S. Census Bureau,” 2018), but according to the One Economy report, this wealth disparity disproportionately impacts black residents. 47% of Black households have an annual household income of less than \$25,000. In comparison, only 18% of all Polk County households have an income less than \$25,000. With lower wages and less work, black residents of Polk County are at higher risk of a variety of challenges, including experiencing homelessness. The United Way of Central Iowa reports that the cost of basic household expenses in Iowa increased steadily to \$56,772 for a family of four and \$19,560 for a single adult—significantly higher than the Federal Poverty line of \$24,300 for a family of four and \$11,880 for a single adult.

Beyond the economic impact of employment, there’s a great need for Polk County youth to pursue passions, build skills, and develop connections to the community through job and employment opportunities. Knowing the challenges that Polk County youth face in securing employment and a livable wage, coordinated community resources need to be allocated to job training, career connections, and financial education for young residents— especially those experiencing homelessness. Not only will these resources and programming assist in the short term to help the community residents attain stable housing, but long-term to grow a culture of empowerment and advocacy for young people.

### **SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL NEEDS**

We know that for most youth there is not just one simple cause of homelessness. In fact, complicated social or family dynamics often blend with economic hardships to create barriers to safe, stable housing for Polk County youth. HMIS data from 2018-2019 reveals that TAY often reported a variety of complicating factors including family member unemployment, mental health issues, physical disability, substance abuse, insufficient income, and incarcerated parents as precursors to their housing instability. While each of these issues can be a risk factor for homelessness, many youth experienced multiple types of social traumas and that led to them experiencing homelessness.

Among all youth who entered the Polk County HMIS in 2018-2019, 197 (30%) said they had experienced domestic violence. Iowa Homeless Youth Center’s 2018-2019 Emergency Beds VOCA (Victims of Crime Act) report

**30%**

of Polk County Youth in  
HMIS Had Experienced  
Domestic Violence



helps glean a better understanding of domestic violence and victimization youth have experienced. This data shows that the shelter served 69 new VOCA clients in the year. A majority of these individuals were white (57%), 16% were Black or African American, 13% were multiple races, 11% were Hispanic or Latino/Latina, and 3% were Native American/Alaska Native. All but one of the youth served were TAY and 65% of the youth served were male. Youth reported being the victims of a variety of crimes with both lasting physical and emotional harm. The most common category of victimization was bullying (62%) followed by physical assault (52%), sexual assault as a child or adult (38%), and domestic violence (42%).

For many youth, trauma and victimization is often intertwined with mental health concerns. HMIS data from 2018-2019 indicates that the majority (56%) of TAY who indicated they had a disability, cited a mental health issue. Unfortunately, with so many youth experiencing issues with their mental health, resources in Polk County are unable to meet the demand, and are extremely limited. Only a small number of mental health professionals who serve youth exist, especially in rural areas. Consequently, many youth go without necessary services and treatments, often worsening conditions before becoming homeless and while experiencing homelessness.

We can also gain a better understanding of the social and familial factors that contribute to youth homelessness by examining ACEs or Adverse Childhood Experiences. According to ACES 360 Iowa Beyond ACEs report, these are “traumatic events that can dramatically upset a child’s sense of safety and wellbeing.” Over half (56%) of Iowa adults have experienced at least one of eight types of child abuse and household dysfunction. Of those, 14.5% have experienced four or more types (“Beyond ACEs”, 2016). As the number of ACEs increases so too does the likelihood of risky behaviors for youth, health issues, and the potential for future trauma. Thus, we know that the Iowa youth who have experienced multiple ACEs are those most at risk of experiencing homelessness. The impacts of these ACEs are not only social and emotional, but biological as well. Youth who experience consistent, increased levels of stress due to ACEs also display disrupted brain development, leading to poor health, learning, and social outcomes (“Beyond ACEs”, 2016). Thus, when working with youth who have experienced homelessness, it’s essential to build caring, positive connections for young people using trauma-informed care and positive youth development principles. With this healing-centered approach serving youth experiencing homelessness, Polk County can truly address the social/emotional needs of its residents while helping them reach safe, stable housing.



## SECTION 2

# OUR PARTNERS



*Polk County Youth Action Council Members*



**OUR PARTNERS**

PARTNER	ORGANIZATION(S)	INVOLVEMENT
<b>CoC Board</b>	Polk County Continuum of Care Board	<i>See Description in Appendix</i>
<b>Youth Advisory Board</b>	Polk County Youth Action Council	<i>See Description in Appendix</i>
<b>Local and State Government</b>	City of Des Moines, State of Iowa, and Polk County	<i>See Description in Appendix</i>
<b>Public Child Welfare</b>	Department of Human Services (DHS)	<i>See Description in Appendix</i>
<b>ESG Program Recipients</b>	Central Iowa Shelter Services, Primary Health Care, Iowa Homeless Youth Centers, and Hawthorn Hills	These providers have served on CoC work groups, the YHDP Steering Committee and Stakeholder group, helping to determine community need, set strategies, and provide insight as to the best ways to quickly and stably house youth.
<b>Local and State Law Enforcement + Judges</b>	Des Moines Police Department, Juvenile Court Services, Judge Poschner, and the late Judge Colin Witt	A mental health expert and officer with the Des Moines Police Department has been a crucial representative at YHDP Stakeholder meeting, helping the community think through cross-system collaboration and ways to honor youth voice. Judges and youth advocates have also provided better insight into the system and the youth they work with.



PARTNER	ORGANIZATION(S)	INVOLVEMENT
<p><b>Early Childhood Development and Child Care Providers</b></p>	<p>Drake University Head Start, Des Moines Public Schools Head Start, and Early Head Start</p>	<p>Our community's Head Start programming currently serves families experiencing homelessness. Efforts are underway to develop a regular YHDP workgroup or touch base on strategies to eliminate any potential barriers to early education for pregnant/ parenting youth.</p>
<p><b>Local and State Educational Agencies</b></p>	<p>Des Moines Public Schools and Iowa Department of Education</p>	<p>Des Moines Public Schools staff and homeless liaisons have been instrumental to identifying YHDP education strategies and goals. The Iowa Department of Education has helped provide critical data and will assist with further trainings and efforts</p>
<p><b>Runaway and Homeless Youth Program Providers</b></p>	<p>Iowa Homeless Youth Centers</p>	<p>As the primary youth-serving provider in Des Moines, IHYC staff and youth have been instrumental in the YHDP process from Steering Committee meetings to YAC membership and building housing solutions for youth and young adults.</p>
<p><b>Non-profit Youth Organizations</b></p>	<p>Children and Families of Iowa, Young Women's Resource Center, Youth Emergency Services and Shelter, Community Youth Concepts, Monsoon Iowa, Dorothy's House, Iowa Safe Schools, and Youth Homes of Mid-America</p>	<p>Nonprofit youth organizations in the greater Des Moines area create an important network of support for community youth. These organizations provide unique cultural experiences and opportunities for positive youth development and family engagement. These groups have partnered on YHDP objectives.</p>



PARTNER	ORGANIZATION(S)	INVOLVEMENT
<p><b>Juvenile and Adult Corrections and Probation</b></p>	<p>Juvenile Court Services and Iowa Legal Aid</p>	<p>JCS representatives have attended Stakeholder conversations to plan for better youth transitions out of JCS care and discuss innovative cross-systems projects to serve justice-involved youth. Legal experts and youth advocates also brought forth legal barriers youth face in obtaining housing and potential solutions.</p>
<p><b>Health, Mental Health, and Substance Abuse Agencies</b></p>	<p>Primary Health Care Inc., MercyOne Des Moines, Orchard Place, Iowa ACEs 360, Polk County Health Services, and Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence</p>	<p>Health and mental health especially was identified early on as a crucial goal for Des Moines YHDP planning. These organizations provided data and insight into how the systems currently work for youth and have been involved in working with the CoC, community, and YAC to craft social/emotional health objectives and action items.</p>
<p><b>WIOA Boards and Employment Agencies</b></p>	<p>Goodwill of Central Iowa, Evelyn K. Davis Center for Working Families, and Connect2Careers - WIOA Youth Provider</p>	<p>These agencies have helped create detailed plans to meet the employment goals of youth experiencing homelessness. They've focused on youth choice and providing an array of options to explore through the YHDP CCP.</p>
<p><b>Landlords</b></p>	<p>Anawim Housing</p>	<p>Anawim is the community's key Permanent Supportive Housing provider and is represented on several CoC workgroups to provide landlord and leasing process insight.</p>



PARTNER	ORGANIZATION(S)	INVOLVEMENT
<b>Public Housing Authorities</b>	Des Moines Municipal Housing Agency	DMMHA has been kept informed of YHDP progress and provided advice, resources, and knowledge about community housing.
<b>Institutions of Higher Education</b>	Iowa and Minnesota Campus Compact, Drake University, and Des Moines Area Community College	Work is currently underway to establish a higher education workgroup and listserv to address college/university housing and resources. Partners have attended meetings and provided input on YHDP education strategies to help youth achieve their educational goals.
<b>Community Development Corporations</b>	Neighborhood Finance Corporation	The Neighborhood Finance Corporation has been invited to participate in YHDP work and we look forward to future partnership
<b>Affordable Housing Developers</b>	HOME, Inc. and Anawim Housing	Stakeholder Meeting members who help envision how YHDP fit into the larger effort for affordable housing in greater Des Moines.
<b>Local Advocacy, Research, and Philanthropic Organizations</b>	Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines, Wells Fargo, Institute for Community Alliances, United Way of Central Iowa, Mid-Iowa Health Foundation, Child and Family Policy Center, Polk County Crisis and Advocacy Services, and Youth Policy Institute of Iowa	These organizations provide funding and policy guidance to the community at large in the effort to support youth housing and resources. They provided great data while crafting the YHDP Statement of Need and will continue to be key partners in advocacy and ensuring the sustainability of YHDP work.

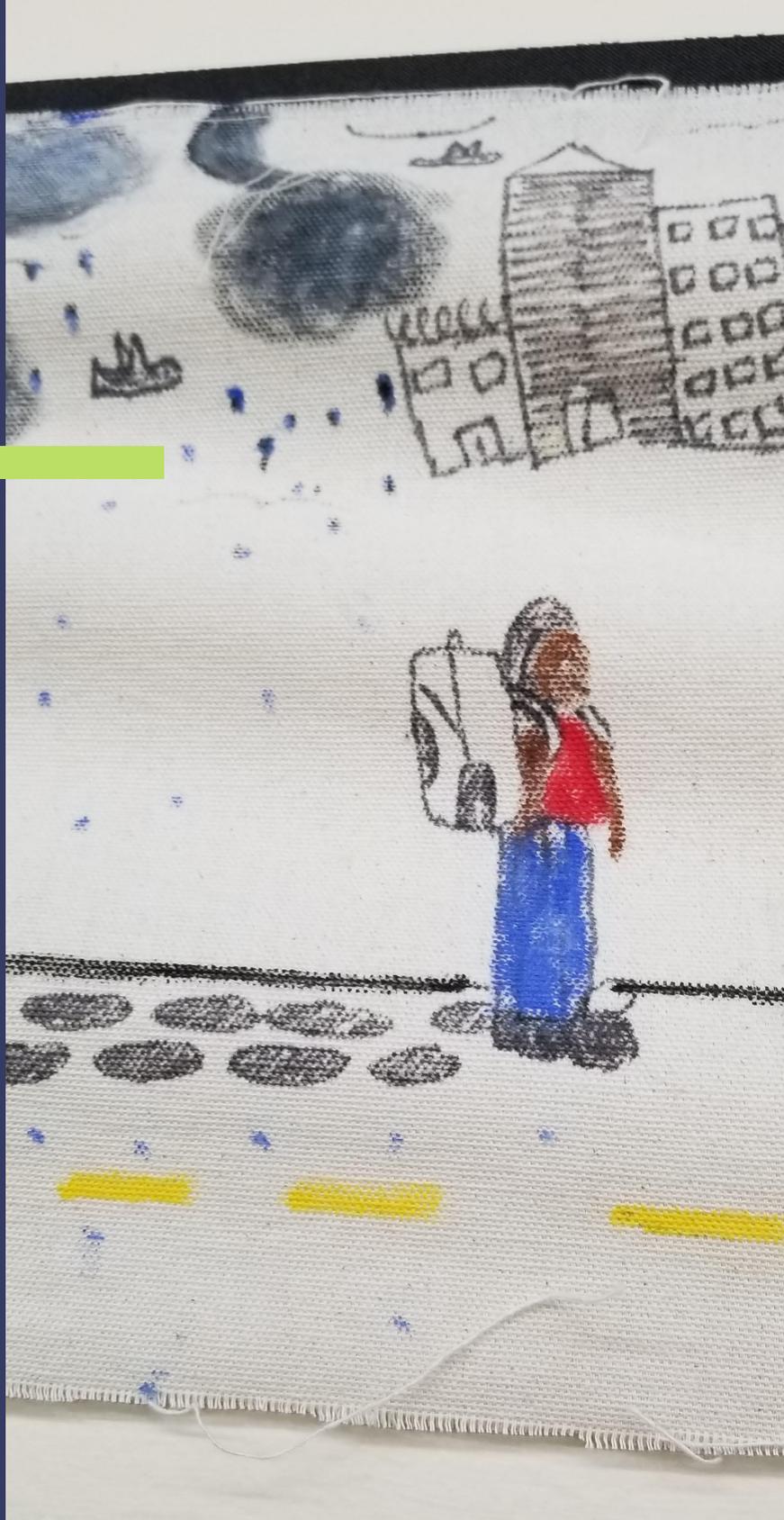


PARTNER	ORGANIZATION(S)	INVOLVEMENT
<b>Privately Funded Homeless Organizations</b>	Central Iowa Shelter Services and Anawim Housing	It is crucial that the YHDP planning process was inclusive of as many providers as possible. These organizations brought forth important anecdotal data from clients and help envision the ideal homeless response system for our community.



**SECTION 3**

**VISION  
AND PLAN**



*Art by Polk County Youth Action Council Member*



**VISION STATEMENT**

All people in Polk County will have a supportive, safe, and stable place to call home.

*All people in Polk County will have a*

**SAFE,  
SUPPORTIVE,  
& STABLE**

*place to call*

**HOME.**

A decorative graphic at the bottom of the box consisting of a dark blue wavy horizontal band above a light green wavy horizontal band.



In order to achieve this vision, The Continuum of Care and Polk County community seek to develop and sustain a fully optimized homeless crisis response system that can quickly and effectively prevent or end literal homelessness – every day and for everyone. Accomplishing this requires adequate resources, adherence to our guiding principles, and use of evidence-based practices. It also depends on having an effective, community-wide prevention system that prioritizes access to assistance for individuals at greater risk of homelessness and resolves housing crises before literal homelessness occurs. Finally, more organized and targeted community-based prevention services can reduce the need for assistance from the homeless crisis response system.

To support this vision of supportive, safe and stable homes, we plan to achieve the following goals:



**GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND ACTION ITEMS**

**GOAL 1 → Prevention via Permanent Connections**

The community will join together to prevent youth homelessness by fostering safe, healthy, stable families and permanent connections for youth.

<b>OBJECTIVE 1.1: Keep families safe and together whenever possible.</b>		
<b>ACTION ITEM 1-</b> Increase access to evidence-based family therapies that support positive family connections, build problem-solving and communication skills, and address youth substance abuse and other maladaptive behaviors.	Timeframe: Begin in Year One, ongoing thereafter	Partner(s) Responsible: Orchard Place, Children and Families of Iowa,
<b>ACTION ITEM 2-</b> Incorporate system-wide rapid resolution/diversion efforts to keep families together and/or help connect youth with chosen family supports.	Timeframe: 1-3 years	Partner(s) Responsible: Primary Health Care And Polk County CoC
<b>ACTION ITEM 3-</b> Boost availability and accessibility of adolescent parenting support, parent education, and other child abuse prevention programs and community initiatives.	Timeframe: 1-3 years	Partner(s) Responsible: United Way, Iowa Department of Public Health, Young Women’s Resource Center, and Prevent Child Abuse Iowa



<b>OBJECTIVE 1.2: Ensure that youth who are involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems have the social networks, skills, and resources needed to gain and maintain stable housing before exiting care.</b>		
<p><b>ACTION ITEM 1-</b> Educate Guardians Ad Litem, judges, attorneys and others about the needs of youth as they exit care—particularly in relation to family dynamics and safe re-engagement with families.</p>	<p>Timeframe: 1-3 years, and ongoing</p>	<p>Partner(s) Responsible: Bar Association, 5th Judicial District, DHS</p>
<p><b>ACTION ITEM 2-</b> Promote adolescent brain development, self-determination, and positive relationships by ensuring youth have quality Youth Transition Decision Making (YTDM) meetings focusing on strong housing plans and identifying people for long-term support.</p>	<p>Timeframe: 1-3 years</p>	<p>Partner(s) Responsible: YHDP Stakeholders Group</p>
<p><b>ACTION ITEM 3-</b> Seek resources to expand efforts of Juvenile Court Services (JCS) and Department of Human Services (DHS) to amplify the strengths of youth through comprehensive individualized exit planning and supportive services.</p>	<p>Timeframe: Begin funding advocacy in year one with targeted completion by year 5</p>	<p>Partner(s) Responsible: DHS, JCS, CoC, Child &amp; Family Policy Center, United Way of Central Iowa</p>
<p><b>ACTION ITEM 4-</b> Advocate for the extension of foster care from age 18 to 21 to ensure safety and stability for emerging adults.</p>	<p>Timeframe: 1-3 years</p>	<p>Partner(s) Responsible: DHS, JCS, YPII, Child &amp; Family Policy Center</p>
<p><b>ACTION ITEM 5-</b> Transition the YHDP Stakeholders Group into an active work group of JCS and DHS staff and contractors, homeless service providers, and youth advocates to build skills, knowledge, and best practices to effectively work with transition-age youth.</p>	<p>Timeframe: 6 months</p>	<p>Partner(s) Responsible: CoC</p>



<b>OBJECTIVE 1.3: Develop a network of support to ensure Polk County youth have connections to family, community, school, mentorship, and other social supports.</b>		
<b>ACTION ITEM 1-</b> Expand child development supports and child care subsidies to better support pregnant and parenting youth.	Timeframe: 1-3 years	Partner(s) Responsible: YWRC, EveryStep, Head Start
<b>ACTION ITEM 2-</b> Provide support and resources for parents and families with LGBTQ youth.	Timeframe: 1-3 years	Partner(s) Responsible: One Iowa, PHC
<b>ACTION ITEM 3-</b> Invest in after school programs and mentorship between community members and youth.	Timeframe: 1 year and ongoing	Partner(s) Responsible: Community Youth Concepts, Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Iowa, YMCA, Iowa Afterschool Network
<b>ACTION ITEM 4-</b> Create a system map of non-homeless specific resources that will increase youth diversion efforts including education, social services, public benefits, and healthcare.	Timeframe: 2 years, then ongoing updates	Partner(s) Responsible: Coc and Primary Health Care



**GOAL 2 → Identification**

The community will identify all youth and young adults who are experiencing or are at imminent risk of experiencing homelessness.

<b>OBJECTIVE 2.1: Identify vulnerable students and their families within the Polk County school system.</b>		
<b>ACTION ITEM 1-</b> Develop a working group of Polk County school homeless liaisons to identify, share, and implement best practices to serve vulnerable students.	Timeframe: 6 months-1 year	Partner(s) Responsible: CoC, Mid Iowa Health Fellowship, Des Moines Public Schools, Iowa Department of Education
<b>ACTION ITEM 2-</b> Develop partnerships between the Polk County Continuum of Care and school districts that provide cross-discipline learning opportunities between schools, Centralized Intake, and homeless service providers.	Timeframe: 1-3 years	Partner(s) Responsible: CoC and District Leadership
<b>ACTION ITEM 3-</b> Allocate time during new school orientation to educate staff, teachers, and students on indicators of homelessness and discuss practices to help students access the local homeless response resources.	Timeframe: 1 year, then ongoing	Partner(s) Responsible: Department of Education, School Districts, Polk County Supervisors, CoC, DMACC, Campus Compact

<b>OBJECTIVE 2.2: Ensure Polk County is a data-informed community by collecting information across multiple systems to better understand YYA at-risk of or experiencing homelessness</b>		
<b>ACTION ITEM 1-</b> Identify opportunities for county-wide data sharing across sectors (homeless response system, schools, JCS, DHS, etc.) to track vulnerable students.	Timeframe: 3-5 years	Partner(s) Responsible: CoC, Des Moines Public Schools, JCS, and DHS



<p><b>ACTION ITEM 2-</b> Assess the current Centralized Intake process and determine ongoing efforts to make Centralized Intake highly functional, accessible and youth-friendly.</p>	<p>Timeframe: 1 year</p>	<p>Partner(s) Responsible: Institute for Community Alliances (ICA) and YAC</p>
<p><b>ACTION ITEM 3-</b> Evaluate Transition-Age-Youth VI-SPDAT effectiveness and explore options to maximize data quality and accuracy.</p>	<p>Timeframe: 1 year</p>	<p>Partner(s) Responsible: ICA, CoC, Racial Equity Workgroup</p>

**OBJECTIVE 2.3: Improve identification and referral of youth experiencing or at risk of homeless to available services**

<p><b>ACTION ITEM 1-</b> Develop a best practice question list for use by jails, hospitals, schools, doctor’s offices, etc. to identify and refer youth who are at high risk of homelessness that includes mental health, physical health and safety status.</p>	<p>Timeframe: 1-3 years</p>	<p>Partner(s) Responsible: CoC, JCS, Hospitals</p>
<p><b>ACTION ITEM 2-</b> At intake, continue to screen youth for human trafficking, sexual assault, domestic violence, physical violence and substance abuse, and immediately connect them to needed supports and services.</p>	<p>Timeframe: Ongoing</p>	<p>Partner(s) Responsible: Primary Health Care</p>
<p><b>ACTION ITEM 3-</b> Maintain a By-Name List of homeless youth through Polk County Continuum of Care Board work group to ensure youth are quickly connected to case management services and other supportive services and relationships.</p>	<p>Timeframe: Ongoing</p>	<p>Partner(s) Responsible: CoC</p>



**GOAL 3 → Pathways to Stable Housing**

The community will rapidly link youth and young adults with safe, affordable, and low-barrier housing of their choice and voluntary supports.

<b>OBJECTIVE 3.1: Increase the number and availability of welcoming, safe places for youth under 18 to sleep and/or engage in services</b>		
<b>ACTION ITEM 1-</b> Develop a mechanism for unaccompanied, non-system involved youth under 18 to access shelter and housing services, including emergency shelter.	Timeframe: 1 year	Partner(s) Responsible: CoC, YHDP Steering Committee
<b>ACTION ITEM 2-</b> Advocate for minors to make their own housing decisions and work to overcome legal and system barriers to appropriate housing.	Timeframe: 3 years	Partner(s) Responsible: CoC, State of Iowa, Polk County, Iowa Legal Aid, Youth Law Center, DHS
<b>ACTION ITEM 3-</b> Expand the availability and programming of drop-in centers for youth.	Timeframe: 1 year	Partner(s) Responsible: Iowa Homeless Youth Center, CoC

<b>OBJECTIVE 3.2: Build on the existing array of Polk County housing options and supports to meet each youth’s individualized needs</b>		
<b>ACTION ITEM 1-</b> Dedicate Permanent Supportive Housing units for youth, young adults and young families that do not include chronicity requirements.	Timeframe: 1 year	Partner(s) Responsible: YHDP Project Grantee
<b>ACTION ITEM 2-</b> Expand housing resources for youth who are doubled up; either living with family, friends, or other non-relatives.	Timeframe: 1-3 years	Partner(s) Responsible: CoC/YHDP Grantees



<p><b>ACTION ITEM 3-</b> Expand Rapid Rehousing programs— particularly longer term (24 months)— to rapidly connect youth and young families experiencing homelessness to stable housing with supportive services and financial support.</p>	<p>Timeframe: 6 months- 1 year</p>	<p>Partner(s) Responsible: YHDP Grantee</p>
<p><b>ACTION ITEM 4-</b> Create a “Youth Housing Navigator” position that works specifically with youth and young adults under age 25 who aren’t eligible for other programs or for those who age out of care.</p>	<p>Timeframe: 1-3 years</p>	<p>Partner(s) Responsible: YHDP Grantee, Centralized Intake, IHYC</p>

**OBJECTIVE 3.3: Expand housing options that reflect the strengths and needs of young adults who have had juvenile justice and child welfare involvement**

<p><b>ACTION ITEM 1-</b> Develop a model to provide permanent housing with support for youth aging out of care— with subsidized rent through Family Unification Program, Preparation for Adult Living (PAL), rent subsidy through Iowa Finance Authority, or private funding sources.</p>	<p>Timeframe: 3-5 years</p>	<p>Partner(s) Responsible: DHS, CoC, YPII, Child and Family Policy, JCS</p>
<p><b>ACTION ITEM 2-</b> Evaluate Family Unification Program (FUP) voucher priority levels and expand when possible to maximize its use for transitioning youth.</p>	<p>Timeframe: 1-2 years</p>	<p>Partner(s) Responsible: DHS, YPII, CoC, IFA</p>
<p><b>ACTION ITEM 3-</b> Explore housing options for youth who have felonies, sex offenses, mental health challenges, and other barriers that preclude them from many housing solutions.</p>	<p>Timeframe: 3-5 years</p>	<p>Partner(s) Responsible: CoC-led task force and Housing Committee</p>



<b>OBJECTIVE 3.4: Work to remove legal or financial barriers to housing for Polk County youth.</b>		
<b>ACTION ITEM 1</b> - Increase access to legal advocacy programs that works with youth to obtain expungements, renter rights education, and other legal remedies to remove barriers.	Timeframe: 2-3 years	Partner(s) Responsible: CoC, Iowa Legal Aid, Youth Law Center, JCS
<b>ACTION ITEM 2</b> - Develop a flexible funding assistance program dedicated to youth and young adults that includes help with utilities, transportation, and other needs.	Timeframe: 2 years	Partner(s) Responsible: CoC
<b>ACTION ITEM 3</b> - Explore resources to provide apartment application and deposit fees to young adults including the use of rapid resolution.	Timeframe: 1 year	Partner(s) Responsible: CoC, PHC

<b>OBJECTIVE 3.5: Communicate with Polk County youth to make them aware of housing services and supports</b>		
<b>ACTION ITEM 1</b> - Develop a youth-focused/youth-driven publicity campaign around how to access services.	Timeframe: 1 year	Partner(s) Responsible: CoC, YAC, PHC, IHYC
<b>ACTION ITEM 2</b> - Create an online resource directory that maps all available youth housing services in the county and how to access them.	Timeframe: 1 year	Partner(s) Responsible: CoC, YAC, PHC, DMPD, YHDP Stakeholders Group
<b>ACTION ITEM 3</b> - Bolster street outreach efforts for YYA.	Timeframe: 3 years	Partner(s) Responsible: PHC, IHYC



**GOAL 4 → Support Social/Emotional Wellbeing**

The community will provide opportunities and supports that are healing-centered and responsive to the individual strengths of youth experiencing homelessness.

<b>OBJECTIVE 4.1: Create a county-wide culture of trauma-informed care and positive youth development.</b>		
<b>ACTION ITEM 1-</b> Fund trainings for system providers on Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) and Positive Youth Development (PYD) and create training guides to carry learning forward.	Timeframe: 6 months- 1 year	Partner(s) Responsible: CoC and YAC
<b>ACTION ITEM 2-</b> Research and implement a simple evaluation for all Polk County CoC partners to ensure programming meets trauma-informed/healing-centered care principles.	Timeframe: 2 years	Partner(s) Responsible: YHDP Steering Committee
<b>ACTION ITEM 3-</b> Invest in a YAC-driven program guide of standards and principles to best support the unique developmental needs of youth.	Timeframe:1-2 years	Partner(s) Responsible: YAC, CYC, GDMLI Youth Council

<b>OBJECTIVE 4.2: Work to reduce trauma in the homeless response system with a healing-centered approach to supporting youth.</b>		
<b>ACTION ITEM 1-</b> Ensure initial intake assessments gather information regarding connections with supportive adults.	Timeframe: 6 month, then ongoing	Partner(s) Responsible: CI Work Group and Coordinated Services Committee
<b>ACTION ITEM 2-</b> Create training on family reconnection skills with support and direction from YAC.	Timeframe: 1-2 years	Partner(s) Responsible: Rapid Resolution Workgroup YAC
<b>ACTION ITEM 3-</b> Provide youth with ongoing opportunities for self-care, bonding, and social and recreational options with their peers.	Timeframe: 6 months and ongoing	Partner(s) Responsible: Youth-serving orgs, YHDP Grantees, Schools, Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Iowa



**OBJECTIVE 4.3: Provide YYA with positive social development opportunities**

<p><b>ACTION ITEM 1-</b> Infuse CoC trainings with principles of adolescent brain development to help the community better understand the unique needs of young people.</p>	<p>Timeframe: 6 months and ongoing</p>	<p>Partner(s) Responsible: CoC</p>
<p><b>ACTION ITEM 2-</b> For pregnant and parenting youth, establish positive social groups and connections with other new or seasoned parents.</p>	<p>Timeframe: 6 months-1 year and ongoing</p>	<p>Partner(s) Responsible: YWRC, Hospitals, and Planned Parenthood</p>
<p><b>ACTION ITEM 3-</b> Create opportunities for youth to meaningfully engage in their community, including volunteerism and peer mentorship.</p>	<p>Timeframe: 6 months and ongoing</p>	<p>Partner(s) Responsible: YHDP Grantees, CYC, Boys &amp; Girls Clubs</p>

**OBJECTIVE 4.4: Support the complex mental/behavioral health needs of youth through connections to comprehensive services**

<p><b>ACTION ITEM 1-</b> Address barriers to youth accessing mental health services including transportation hurdles and explore flexibility of bringing services to youth.</p>	<p>Timeframe: 1 year</p>	<p>Partner(s) Responsible: PCHS, Everly Ball, DHS/Medicaid</p>
<p><b>ACTION ITEM 2-</b> Invest in housing options that support youth with severe mental illness or developmental disabilities.</p>	<p>Timeframe: 1 year</p>	<p>Partner(s) Responsible: YHDP Grantees, CoC, PCHS</p>



**GOAL 5 → Education and Employment Opportunities**

The community will improve education and employment outcomes and provide diverse, skill-building opportunities to ensure youth are successful and thriving

<b>OBJECTIVE 5.1: Provide support to Polk County youth in their personal development and goal setting and provide adequate resources to attain those goals</b>		
<b>ACTION ITEM 1-</b> All youth will design a transportation plan to meet their individual needs. The CoC will pursue innovative partnerships with public transportation providers to serve youth experiencing homelessness.	Timeframe: 3 years	Partner(s) Responsible: DART, CoC, City of Des Moines, Private Transportation companies
<b>ACTION ITEM 2-</b> Provide Youth Action Council members with ongoing trainings on leadership, meeting facilitation, and community concepts to empower them to lead and set goals for the future.	Timeframe: now, and ongoing	Partner(s) Responsible: YAC, YAC Facilitators
<b>ACTION ITEM 3-</b> Create pathways to independence by meeting YYA where they are and providing skill building, financial readiness, soft skills, and other learning opportunities.	Timeframe: 1 year	Partner(s) Responsible: WIOA, CFI, Youth Build, Justice League of Food, United Way

<b>OBJECTIVE 5.2: Increase high school and college graduation rates among students experiencing homelessness or at-risk of homelessness</b>		
<b>ACTION ITEM 1-</b> Further develop partnership between the Polk County educational system stakeholders and Continuum of Care for regular meetings and information sharing.	Timeframe: 6 months, then ongoing	Partner(s) Responsible: CoC, School Districts, DMPS, Iowa Department of Education
<b>ACTION ITEM 2-</b> Create a workgroup of regional colleges and universities to address housing needs and barriers, including housing for students during school breaks.	Timeframe: 6 months-1 year	Partner(s) Responsible: CoC and Iowa Campus Compact



<p><b>ACTION ITEM 3-</b> Continue to support homeless liaisons in Polk County schools and track progress as they intentionally connect with students and provide proactive educational support.</p>	<p>Timeframe: 1-3 years</p>	<p>Partner(s) Responsible: CoC</p>
<p><b>ACTION ITEM 4-</b> Explore options for flexible funding to meet financial gaps while in school including food, educational training materials, books, etc.</p>	<p>Timeframe: 2-3 years</p>	<p>Partner(s) Responsible: Iowa Campus Compact, Schools and Universities</p>

**OBJECTIVE 5.3: Support youth with training and employment resources to help build a pathway to long-term success and stability**

<p><b>ACTION ITEM 1-</b> Increase awareness of trade certificate programs among youth, especially in emerging Iowa industries of solar, wind, etc.</p>	<p>Timeframe: 1-2 years</p>	<p>Partner(s) Responsible: Schools, Trade Associations</p>
<p><b>ACTION ITEM 2-</b> Explore further work stipend programs in Polk County that support housing costs while youth learn a new field or career.</p>	<p>Timeframe: 3 years</p>	<p>Partner(s) Responsible: Workforce Development</p>
<p><b>ACTION ITEM 3-</b> Programs will connect all youth with WIOA services that can support educational completion, training and employment for self-sufficiency.</p>	<p>Timeframe: 1 year, and ongoing</p>	<p>Partner(s) Responsible: YHDP Grantees, WIOA</p>
<p><b>ACTION ITEM 4-</b> Build upon current employer-based partnerships to grow the number of employers who will commit to hiring and training youth and young adults.</p>	<p>Timeframe: 6 months- 1 year</p>	<p>Partner(s) Responsible: Goodwill, Connect 2 Careers, DMACC, Youth Build</p>
<p><b>ACTION ITEM 5-</b> Work as a community to advocate for raising Iowa’s minimum wage to ensure youth can access jobs and careers with a living wage.</p>	<p>Timeframe: 1-3 years</p>	<p>Partner(s) Responsible: Iowa Workforce Development, United Way</p>



**GOAL 6 → Community-Level Systemic Solutions**

The community will eliminate disparities for youth of color and LGBTQ youth to ensure equitable experiences within high quality programs and services.

<b>OBJECTIVE 6.1: Reduce overrepresentation of youth of color who are experiencing homelessness</b>		
<b>ACTION ITEM 1-</b> Work with the Polk County Continuum of Care Racial Equity group to analyze root causes of housing disparities for youth of color.	Timeframe: 1-2 years	Partner(s) Responsible: CoC Racial Equity Group
<b>ACTION ITEM 2-</b> Recruit and retain new leaders of color in homeless service organizations and the Continuum of Care Board.	Timeframe: 3-5 years	Partner(s) Responsible: Racial Equity Group, YAC
<b>ACTION ITEM 3-</b> Train housing and service providers on racial equity, racial bias, heteronormativity bias, social class bias, and sexism.	Timeframe: Beginning year 1	Partner(s) Responsible: CoC

<b>OBJECTIVE 6.2: Support the positive youth development of LGBTQ YYA</b>		
<b>ACTION ITEM 1-</b> Develop inclusive Polk County Continuum of Care Board- level and organization-level protocols for serving LGBTQ youth.	Timeframe: 2 years	Partner(s) Responsible: CoC, One Iowa
<b>ACTION ITEM 2-</b> Recruit LGBTQ staff and peer mentors to work with youth in the homeless response system and other youth-serving organizations and systems.	Timeframe: 4 years	Partner(s) Responsible: CoC, One Iowa
<b>ACTION ITEM 3-</b> Ensure LGBTQ youth can access gender affirming healthcare, supports, and sex education in Polk County.	Timeframe: 1-3 years	Partner(s) Responsible: Hospitals, Polk County Health Department, DMPS



<b>OBJECTIVE 6.3: Develop a coordinated community advocacy strategy to eliminate systemic government barriers to youth housing and overall wellness</b>		
<b>ACTION ITEM 1-</b> CoC and YAC members will participate in advocacy events, including letter sign-ons and Homeless Day on the Hill to advocate for resources needed to prevent and end youth homelessness.	Timeframe: ongoing	Partner(s) Responsible: Iowa Council on Homelessness, CoC, YAC, Faith communities
<b>ACTION ITEM 2-</b> Advocate with the City of Des Moines to prioritize people experiencing homelessness in Section 8 and public housing vouchers.	Timeframe: 2-3 years	Partner(s) Responsible: CoC, Iowa Council on Homelessness, Polk County Housing Trust Fund
<b>ACTION ITEM 3-</b> Advocate for safe, affordable and accessible housing in Polk County for families making less than 30% of Average Median Income.	Timeframe: 3-5 years	Partner(s) Responsible: Polk County Housing Trust Fund, City of Des Moines
<b>ACTION ITEM 4-</b> Build on One Economy: Building Opportunity for All, The State of Black Polk County report to focus on efforts to improve the lives of black youth and families.	Timeframe: 1 year	Partner(s) Responsible: CoC and One Economy Leadership Group

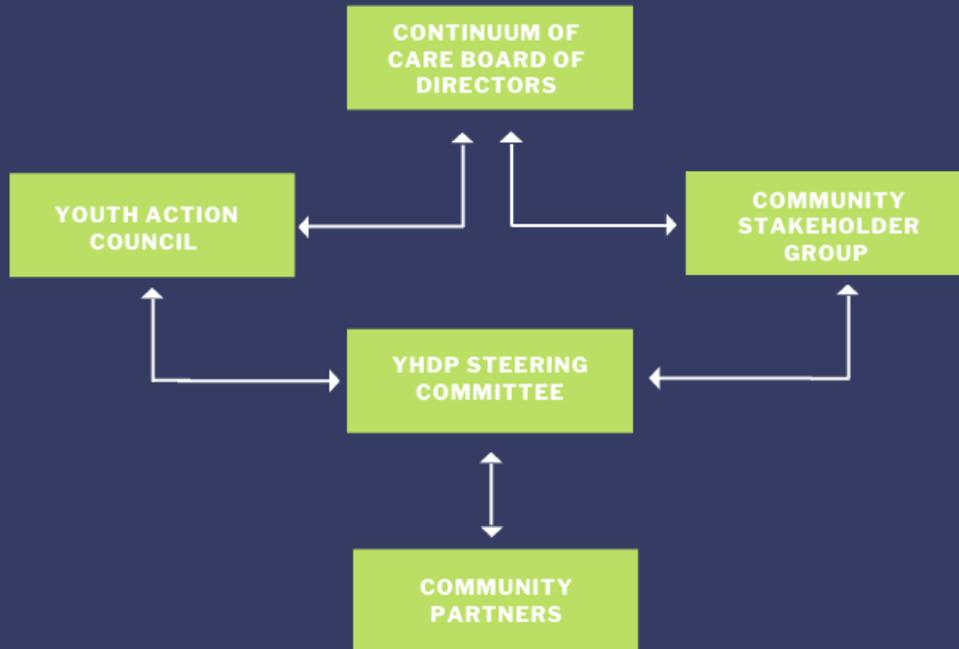
<b>OBJECTIVE 6.4: Use community data and improve systems to better analyze root causes of homelessness in Polk County and the intersectionality of issues relating to YYA</b>		
<b>ACTION ITEM 1-</b> Create new required HMIS fields to identify and track progress in eliminating disparities in service delivery or outcomes.	Timeframe: 1 year	Partner(s) Responsible: ICA and Racial Equity Workgroup
<b>ACTION ITEM 2-</b> Continue to build the Youth Action Council and partner for program and policy improvements.	Timeframe: ongoing	Partner(s) Responsible: CoC, IHYC, YAC



**GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE**

# POLK COUNTY YHDP

## GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE



**POLK COUNTY CONTINUUM OF CARE BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Provides implementation and oversight of the Coordinated Community Plan (CCP), monitors progress toward stated goals, and reviews and approves major changes or updates to the CCP.

**YOUTH ACTION COUNCIL**

Guides development of the plan, provides input and oversight on design and implementation of projects, makes recommendations for course correction, works in partnership with the Community Stakeholder Group, and recommends overall plan to CoC Board.

**COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDER GROUP**

Key mainstream system liaisons that assist with the needs assessment, determine local practice standards, develop goals and outcomes, and share recommendations with the YAC.

**STEERING COMMITTEE**

Led by the YHDP lead agency, the committee participates in plan development, provides oversight and input on progress, recommends project types, and partners in ongoing evaluation.

**COMMUNITY PARTNERS**

External stakeholders representing a diverse array of community organizations that help to identify evidence-based practices and outcomes. Provides guidance to the Steering Committee and ongoing collaboration to ensure execution of the community's goals.



## **YHDP PROJECTS**

### **Transitional Housing to Rapid Rehousing Model (TH-RRH)**

**Summary-** This project will provide short-term, crisis housing (TH) for youth/young adults while working with the youth to quickly exit them to permanent housing (RRH). Youth in the TH program will be provided a low-barrier, safe and healthy shelter. Navigation services will be provided to connect youth/young adults with supportive services and a rapid pathway to permanent housing. Participants will have the option to choose crisis housing (TH) and/or rapid rehousing (RRH) assistance upon entry to the program, and both components must be available for the youth to choose from.

**Needs Met-** Fulfills a need for emergency/crisis shelter, while helping youth transition to permanent, stable housing

**Target Population-** Youth ages 18-24, including special populations of youth who are Pregnant/Parenting, LGBTQ, victims of trafficking, and those fleeing domestic violence. Project has the potential to serve youth under 18 as well.

#### **Essential Elements**

- Hands-on case management in and outside of the office setting.
- Focus on skill-building
- Provides opportunities for participants to connect with each other through community activities, volunteerism, support groups, and other formal/informal peer groups
- Principles of Positive Youth Development
- Culturally responsive approach
- Housing First
- Youth Choice

**HUD Categories Served-** Categories 1,2, and 4

**HUD Project Type-** Joint Project: Transitional Housing and Rapid Rehousing (TH/RRH)

#### **Outcomes**

- Short length of stay in Transitional Housing
- Successful Exit to Permanent Housing
- Low return to homeless or long-term Successful Housing Retention

**USICH Outcomes Addressed-** Stable Housing, Permanent Connections,

**Estimated Budget-** Annually \$250,000-\$300,000 (2 year \$500,000-\$600,000)



### **Youth Rapid Rehousing (RRH)**

**Summary-** This project will provide rapid rehousing assistance for youth/young adults, including assistance securing safe housing, up to 24 months of rental assistance, security deposits, and voluntary case management and supportive services.

**Needs Met-** Fulfills a need for safe housing, while helping youth transition to permanent, stable housing

**Target Population-** Youth ages 18-24, including special populations of youth who are Pregnant/Parenting, LGBTQ, victims of trafficking, and those fleeing domestic violence

#### **Essential Elements**

- Hands-on case management in an outside of the office setting.
- Focus on skill-building around housing retention
- Provides opportunities for participants to connect with each other through community activities, volunteerism, support groups, and other formal/informal spaces (peer groups)
- Principles of Positive Youth Development
- Culturally responsive approach
- Housing First
- Youth Choice

**HUD Categories Served-** Categories 1,2, and 4

**HUD Project Type-** Rapid Rehousing (RRH)

#### **Outcomes**

- Successful Exit to Permanent Housing
- Low return to homelessness
- High percentage of youth remaining in permanent housing.

**USICH Outcomes Addressed-** Stable Housing, Permanent Connections,

**Estimated Budget-** Annually \$215,000-\$275,000 (2 year \$430,000-\$550,000)



### **Permanent Supportive Housing For Youth (PSH)**

**Summary-** Supportive Housing programs provide non-time-limited housing assistance and supportive services for youth ages 18-24 with disabilities.

**Needs Met-** Create the first dedicated Permanent Supportive Housing program for youth in Polk County. Help youth with disabilities attain stable housing and supports appropriate to their needs.

**Target Population-** Youth ages 18-24 with disabilities, including historically marginalized populations.

#### **Essential Project Elements**

- Intensive case management and coaching
- Principles of Positive Youth Development
- Client-driven
- Culturally responsive approach
- Housing First model
- Non-time limited rental assistance to ensure consistent housing affordability
- Trauma-informed approach
- Transportation support
- Life Skills and training

**HUD Categories Served-** Categories 1 and 4

**HUD Project Type-** Permanent Supportive Housing

#### **Outcomes**

- High percentage of youth remaining in or exiting to permanent housing
- Low percentage of youth returning to homelessness at program exit

**USICH Outcomes Addressed-** Stable Housing, Permanent Connections, Social-Emotional Well-Being

**Estimated Budget-** Annually \$192,000-\$220,000 (2 year \$384,000-\$440,000)



### Youth Housing Navigator (SSO)

**Summary-** This project will create a Youth dedicated housing system navigator who will support identification of youth, navigation of centralized intake, and access to existing housing, connection to non-housing resources and mainstream benefits, and connection to other supports such as education and employment. A housing navigator helps youth experiencing homelessness apply for housing vouchers, attend housing application meetings, complete paperwork, complete the housing search, find an apartment, and sign and understand the responsibilities of their lease. They also work with local landlords and other Polk County system navigators to identify available units and maintain a list for those in need.

**Needs Met-** Polk County has a need for a youth-specific support role to help young people navigate a complex housing system. This project will provide a centralized point of contact and support for young people

**Target Population-** Youth 18-24

#### **Essential Elements-**

- Fair Housing and Equal Access
- Youth Voice and Partnership
- Positive Youth Development
- Trauma-Informed Care
- Youth-Driven Goals
- Evidence-Based Practices
- Community Collaboration

**HUD Categories Served-** Categories 1, 2, and 4

**HUD Project Type-** Supportive Services Only (SSO)

#### **Outcomes-**

- Youth achieve stable housing more quickly
- Shorter length of time young adults are unsheltered
- Youth are able to better maintain stable housing
- Increased community collaboration and system streamlining

**USICH Outcomes Addressed-** Permanent Connections, Education/Employment, Social-Emotional Well Being

**Estimated Budget-** Annually \$53,000-\$63,000 (2 year \$106,000-\$126,000)



### **Mental Health Network (SSO)**

**Summary-** This project aims to support the social/emotional development of youth and young adults as they access and maintain stable housing. Youth have the ability to quickly access clinical mental health specialists, as well as regular meetings with a peer support navigator. These professionals have access to a flexible funding pool to address immediate youth needs including transportation and employment needs. Peer navigator support can ensure a sustainable network of support for young people.

**Needs Met-** Polk County has a need for increased mental health support for youth, especially for those without a diagnosed disability. This project will make social/emotional support more accessible, helping to ensure youth have the tools they need to maintain housing and reach their identified goals.

**Target Population-** Youth 16-24, specifically those of lower vulnerability who are not served by other programs and supports.

#### **Essential Elements-**

- Positive Youth Development
- Trauma-Informed Care
- Youth-Driven Goals
- Peer Support

**HUD Categories Served-** Categories 1, 2, and 4

**HUD Project Type-** Supportive Services Only (SSO)

#### **Outcomes-**

- Percentage of youth obtaining and/or increasing employment
- Successful Exit to Permanent Housing

**USICH Outcomes Addressed-** Permanent Connections, Education/Employment, Social-Emotional Well Being

**Estimated Budget-** Annually \$70,000-\$80,000 (2 year \$140,000-\$160,000)



## Youth Drop-In Services (SSO)

**Summary-** Drop-in programs allow youth and young adults to stop by for basic services such as showers, food, laundry, clothing, case management, transportation, computers, employment programs, crisis counseling, life skills classes, and other services. The Polk County community currently has one youth-specific drop-in center with limited, weekday hours.

**Needs Met-** Providing new drop-in center access and programming will allow the community to reach more youth, including those who are unstably housed or at-risk of experiencing homelessness.

**Target Population-** Drop-in services reach youth 16-24 and special populations in need of additional support.

### **Essential Elements-**

- Welcoming, safe space for youth
- Positive Youth Development
- Trauma-Informed Care
- Culturally responsive approach
- Equitable access to services
- Youth engagement and voice

**HUD Categories Served-** Categories 1, 2, and 4

**HUD Project Type-** Supportive Services Only (SSO)

### **Outcomes-**

- Large numbers of community youth served
- Youth connected to case management

**USICH Outcomes Addressed-** Permanent Connections, Education/Employment, Social-Emotional Well Being

**Estimated Budget-** Annually \$35,000-\$45,000 (2 year \$70,000-\$90,000)



## DATA SYSTEM AND CAPACITY

To ensure the success of YHDP projects and continuous quality improvement, it's essential to analyze the way data works in our homeless response system—and how it should work to best serve youth and guide decision making. This process has established the need for our community to build on what is already working well in the system with new capacity to enhance quantitative analysis and capacity. Through conversations with Stakeholders, partners, youth, and Polk County's HMIS lead, our community has developed both short and long-term data system and capacity goals. To achieve these goals, we've outlined innovative data sharing partnerships, investments in HMIS structure, the need for new measures and data sets, and more.

The following strategies are part of Polk County's plan to increase data system and capacity to ensure the success of YHDP projects:

- Identify vulnerable students and their families within the Polk County school system
- Develop a working group of Polk County school homeless liaisons to identify, share, and implement best practices to serve vulnerable students.
- Ensure Polk County is a data-informed community by collecting information across multiple systems to better understand YYA at-risk of or experiencing homelessness
- Identify opportunities for county-wide data sharing across sectors (homeless response system, schools, JCS, DHS, etc.) to track vulnerable students
- Assess the current Centralized Intake process and determine ongoing efforts to make Centralized Intake highly functional, accessible and youth-friendly.
- Evaluate Transition-Age-Youth VI-SPDAT effectiveness and explore options to maximize data quality and accuracy
- Improve identification and referral of youth experiencing or at risk of homeless to available services
- Research and implement a simple evaluation for all Polk County CoC partners to ensure programming meets trauma-informed/healing-centered care principles.
- Ensure initial intake assessments gather information regarding connections with supportive adults
- Further develop partnership between the Polk County educational system stakeholders and Continuum of Care for regular meetings and information sharing
- Work with the Polk County Continuum of Care Racial Equity group to analyze root causes of housing disparities for black and brown youth.
- Use community data and improve systems to better analyze root causes of homelessness in Polk County and the intersectionality of issues relating to YYA
- Create new required HMIS fields to identify and track progress in eliminating disparities in service delivery or outcome



## CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Polk County CoC, YHDP Leadership, and YAC will work the Des Moines community and partner agencies to monitor progress of YHDP work. To do so, Polk County YHDP leadership will establish desired outcomes at project and system levels at the start of the funding period.

### YHDP Project Outcomes

With input from the Des Moines community, the YHDP Steering Committee will draft broad, intended outcomes for each funded YHDP project. These outcomes will be actionable, measurable, and specific to the unique intent of each youth project. YHDP grantees will then review and finesse these draft outcomes to ensure effective measurement and authentic partnership with recipient organizations. Final project outcomes will then go before the Youth Action Council and YHDP Steering Committee for approval. Lastly, project-level outcomes will be presented for final review by the Performance Measures committee, which will serve as the body responsible for ongoing YHDP project evaluation. The YHDP Coordinator will deliver concrete project outcomes to each grantee prior to project implementation so that organizations can effectively plan and tailor their program as needed.

### Project-Level Outcomes

- Desired project-level outcomes will be based on objectively measurable elements derived from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data elements and the Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) supplemental data elements.
- YHDP Grantees will run agency level reports, which are then verified, and provided to the Performance Measures committee for progress tracking
- Agencies will be responsible for accessing the advanced reporting tool in Service Point to run the custom RHY report and the data quality report.
- Agency YHDP representatives are responsible for verifying the accuracy of the report and correcting any data quality discrepancies, then providing the report to the YHDP Performance Measures committee for use in CQI processes.
- Monthly data completeness reports from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) should be run and tracked by funded agencies
- Youth Action Council and YHDP Steering Committee will both receive qualitative youth feedback reports and provide input and thoughts for each project as needed



## YHDP System Outcomes

Beyond the specific outcomes of YHDP projects, the Polk County community will also work to achieve broader system-level goals in the mission to end youth homelessness. The community will work together to evaluate the progress of system-level goals based on the established evaluation metrics.

- The RHY YHDP dashboard provides a community-level overview of demographic data elements as well as RHY specific measures.
- The YHDP Performance Measures committee will look for disparate outliers in marginalized populations to ensure equitable programming.
- If community goals are not being met, the Performance Measures committee will determine the best course of action to remedy any gap between measured success levels and desired success levels.
- The committee will utilize all information garnered to collectively assess development and make any necessary adjustments to the CCP to achieve long-term outcomes and goals.

## Program Measures Committee

The current CoC Program Measures committee will expand to become the monitoring board for all YHDP projects. This group will regularly examine feedback and data provided by youth and providers to assess progress on a project level in relation to CCP goals. On a quarterly basis, they will collectively determine project effectiveness, offer further assistance, resolve project-related issues, and amend the YHDP Coordinated Community Plan as necessary. To accomplish this, funded agency level reporting will be run and the community YHDP dashboard will be consulted.

## Selected Project Providers

Providers will work with the YHDP Program Measures Committee and CoC staff to establish desired project outcomes and methods for monitoring progress towards achieving those outcomes. Providers will designate a staff member to serve as the YHDP correspondent, responsible for acting as a liaison between the provider and Program Measures Committee. Providers will then track and report data (including youth feedback) relevant to projects commissioned by YHDP to the committee on a quarterly basis. Reporting will include their project's progress, successes, barriers to implementation, and additional needs. When necessary, the Program Measures committee will work with providers to offer further assistance and address challenges as they arise.



## Youth Leadership In CQI

To prioritize and incorporate youth voice and choice, selected projects must include methods for consistently soliciting and reporting youth feedback. This feedback will be instrumental to all YHDP governing decisions—informing us of potential gaps in services, influencing modifications of current projects, and shaping future project development. The Youth Action Council (YAC) will serve as leaders in garnering qualitative feedback through surveys, focus groups, and analysis to monitor project progress and the overall success of CCP efforts. Their feedback and leadership will help drive any program alterations, as necessary.



**SECTION 4**

**SPECIAL  
POPULATIONS**



*Polk County Youth Action Council Members*



## LGBTQ YOUTH DESCRIPTION/NEEDS

Nationally, among young people who experience homelessness, an overwhelming number are LGBTQ – approximately 40% (Price et al., 2019). Because they are at greater risk of homelessness and trauma, it's crucial for Polk County to learn from the experiences of LGBTQ youth and better serve this crucial subpopulation. Polk County RHY data collected from 2018-2019 reports that 16% of youth identified as bisexual, gay, lesbian, or questioning/unsure. While this statistic provides a jumping off point for further study, we know that in our community many LGBTQ youth don't feel comfortable identifying as such during initial intake or assessments. Though they may later come out to a trusted case worker or staff member, their identity may not be accurately reflected in initial data. Thus, though we're able to say that many of the youth served in the community are LGBTQ, it's believed HMIS data may not reflect the full scope of the LGBTQ youth community experiencing homelessness.

Using national data can help us gain a better picture of LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness. For many young people, their sexuality and/or gender identity is a contributing factor to them initially experiencing homelessness. Experiences with bullying in school coupled with family rejection in the home, result in some LGBTQ youth skipping school or running away (Price et al., 2019). According to a report from the [Williams Institute on LGBTQ youth homelessness](#), 32% of LGBTQ youth were experiencing homelessness because of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse at home. Bullying, discrimination, and mistreatment all put LGBTQ youth at greater risk for isolation, trauma, and homelessness. In fact, LGBTQ youth have 120% higher risk of being homeless than their peers (Morton et al., 2018).

While experiencing homelessness, LGBTQ youth continue to face additional barriers due to their sexuality and gender identity expression. Polk County youth report concerns over safety in shelters and social alienation because of who they are. Unfortunately, in our community, LGBTQ young people also face housing discrimination from certain religious shelters and programs. Youth in the Polk County community also report that they face fears over which housing options are accepting of their identity and often hesitate to disclose their sexuality for fears of safety or being removed from the program. This qualitative data provides a disheartening view of the ways in which the Polk County homeless response system works with LGBTQ youth. While we know that these additional barriers and discrimination create more trauma, they can also have even more dire consequences. According to Chapin Hall, LGBTQ youth had over twice the rate of early death among youth experiencing homelessness (Morton et al., 2018). Driven by these statistics and the voices of young people, Polk County is working to meet the urgent needs of vulnerable LGBTQ individuals to ensure they have equitable access to housing, programs, and services.



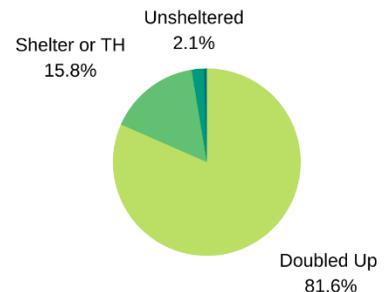
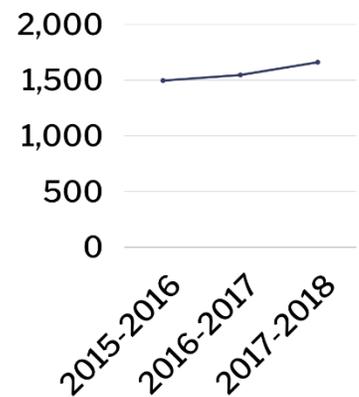
The following strategies related to LGBTQ youth have been incorporated into Polk County’s Coordinated Community Plan:

- Provide support and resources for parents and families with LGBTQ youth
- Develop inclusive Polk County Continuum of Care Board- level and organization-level protocols for serving LGBTQ youth
- Recruit LGBTQ staff and peer mentors to work with youth in the homeless response system and other youth-serving organizations and systems
- Ensure LGBTQ youth can access gender affirming healthcare, supports, and sex education in Polk County
- Partner with Des Moines Pride and queer spaces to nights to provide youth with mentors a sense of community, and opportunities for LGBTQ advocacy

**MINORS DESCRIPTIONS/ NEEDS**

One of the most vulnerable populations in our community is young people under the age of 18 who are unaccompanied and experiencing homelessness. Many communities in Polk County don’t have youth shelters to serve these individuals, meaning that youth under 18 experiencing homelessness rely heavily on their schools for identification, resources, and support. Unfortunately, the total number of homeless students in the county is on the rise in recent years. In the school year 2015-2016, there were 1,496 Polk County students experiencing homelessness. During the 2016-2017 year, there were 1,546 students identified as homeless. By 2017-2018, that number had grown once again to 1,660 total school-aged youth without a safe, stable place to live in Polk County (Iowa Department of Education). Because the education-specific definition of homelessness is broader, identified students in our community are staying in a variety of different places or situations. Among all Polk County Unaccompanied Homeless youth attending school, 81.6% were doubled up, 15.8% were in shelter, transitional housing, or awaiting foster care placement, 2.1% were unsheltered, and .5% were living in a hotel/motel (Iowa Department of Education). No matter where they’re staying, these teens lack a stable place to call home, and thus do not have the necessary resources they need to grow, learn, and develop within the educational system.

**POLK COUNTY STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS**





While unaccompanied youth under 18 represent a broad array of demographics and backgrounds, there are certain subpopulations who are affected by homelessness at a higher rate in our community. According to the Iowa Department of Education, 66% of youth experiencing homelessness in Polk County during the 2017-2018 school year were high school aged teenagers in grades 9-12. Once again, young people of color are also overrepresented in the under 18 population with 22% black/African American, 17% Hispanic, 9% multi-race experiencing homelessness. Youth with a disability and those who are English language learners are the two largest subpopulations of youth experiencing homelessness.

It's clear that young people under 18 need additional supports to attain stable housing—and to attain their educational goals. Naturally, experiencing homelessness makes it difficult for young people to attend school as easily as their peers do. In fact, a youth who experiences homelessness is 87% more likely to stop going to school (Price et al., 2019). The graduation rate of youth experiencing homelessness also indicates the crucial importance of stable housing for youth pursuing their education. In Des Moines Public Schools, the county's largest public school district, the overall graduation rate is on the rise from 78% in 2014-2015 to 82% in 2016-2017. However, the graduation rate for youth who experienced homelessness during their education lags well behind the overall rate. In fact, the graduation rate for students experiencing homelessness in 2014-2015 was 60%. That figure has remained fairly consistent over the years with 63% in 2016-2017 reported as homeless.

The low graduation rate has lasting consequences, perhaps even further enhancing the lack of opportunities for youth and putting them at greater risk of continued homelessness. In fact, as Chapin Hall reports, youth with less than a high school diploma or GED have an astounding 346% higher risk of becoming homeless. Additionally, young adults who experienced homelessness were less than 1/3 as likely to be enrolled in four-year college as their stably housed peers (Dworsky et al, 2018). Thus, for our unaccompanied youth under 18, it's crucial that the Polk County community increase their focus on finding ways to mitigate the risks of homelessness and prepare young people for bright, stable futures.

However, working with youth under 18 presents its own set of challenges within the homeless response system. Minors often can't legally sign documents, represent themselves, or make legal decisions on their own behalf. Especially for youth with past family conflict or abuse, asking for parental consent to enter programs or receive treatment can be an imposing barrier. For those young people who are experiencing homelessness at age 17, they face additional hurdles. Polk County teens anecdotally report at that vulnerable age, there's often not enough time to enter into the extremely limited housing or services available to minors before turning 18. However, at age 17, they are also too young to enter into adult-serving programs or housing, leaving them facing a dangerous lack of resources.



As a community, it's crucial that we address this gap in services to ensure unaccompanied youth under 18 have a clear path to stable housing and supports.

The following strategies related to minors have been incorporated into Polk County's Coordinated Community Plan:

- Invest in after school programs and mentorship between community members and youth
- Develop a working group of Polk County school homeless liaisons to identify, share, and implement best practices to serve vulnerable students
- Develop partnerships between the Polk County Continuum of Care and school districts that provide cross-discipline learning opportunities between schools, Centralized Intake.
- Develop a mechanism for unaccompanied, non-system involved youth under 18 to access shelter and housing services, including emergency shelter
- Advocate for minors to make their own housing decisions and work to overcome legal and system barriers to appropriate housing
- Expand the availability and programming of drop-in centers for youth.
- Continue to support homeless liaisons in Polk County schools and track progress as they intentionally connect with students and provide proactive educational support

### **PREGNANT AND PARENTING YOUTH DESCRIPTIONS/NEEDS**

According to Chapin Hall, unmarried parenting youth had a 200% higher risk of being homeless ("Missed Opportunities", 2018). Additional supports and services are available in the community for pregnant and parenting youth, but the additional expenses, stress, responsibility, and time of child rearing are also severe barriers to stable housing and employment. In fact, the United Way's ALICE report (a study of financial hardship in Iowa) states that child care represents an Iowa family's greatest expense - \$1,031/month for one infant and one preschooler in licensed and accredited childcare. For those already struggling with financial or housing hardships, this cost can simply be overwhelming--and can force families to make choices between paying rent and feeding their family ("ALICE", United Way, 2018). According to Polk County Youth Action Council members, the cost of child care and health care for young parents are some of the largest hurdles to economic and housing stability for their families.

Beyond the economic hardships of being a young parent dealing with housing instability, our community faces a lack of education and resources to help young people learn about pregnancy, sex education, and parenting. Just as services have been reduced nationwide, in



Polk County, Planned Parenthood services have been cut and the state government has restricted funding on sex education. Additionally, the Iowa state government does not fund any adolescent pregnancy prevention programs with the primary aim of adolescent pregnancy prevention (Melby et al., 2018). Moreover, according to an Iowa State University (ISU) study surveying pregnant/parenting TAY transitioning from foster care, our systems are failing to properly educate young people about pregnancy, reproduction, and sexual health. Overall, less than half of respondents (49.4%) felt informed about reproductive health, and there were no gender, racial, or urbanicity differences (Melby et al., 2018). According to this survey, system-involved youth in our state also aren't having conversations about reproduction with the mentors and staff heavily involved in their lives. Less than half of respondents reported receiving any information about reproductive health from their foster placement staff (49.3%), Department of Human Services social worker (42.3%), foster parents (41.7%), or Juvenile Court Officer (26%). (ISU Survey) Naturally, a lack of information about pregnancy prevention and overall reproductive health also translates into a lack of education once system-involved youth are pregnant. Only 25% reported having attended a birthing or baby class during their most recent pregnancy (Melby et al., 2018). This means a majority of young people transitioning out of care aren't receiving crucial information about prenatal care, birthing, and parenting that could assist them as they embark in their new roles as parents.

With a lack of resources and supports identified for pregnant and parenting youth, it's crucial that our YHDP projects reflect the strengths and needs of this population of young people. A recent brief by Child Trends and the Healthy Teen Network identified five core components of supportive housing for pregnant and parenting youth—supports and resources to promote: (1) self sufficiency; (2) housing stability; (3) financial stability; (4) successful and engaged parenting and attachment; and (5) healthy relationships. These principles as well as the voices of our YAC experts and Stakeholders have helped craft housing programs and supportive services to turn the curve for this population and provide concrete strategies to help young families thrive.

The following strategies related to Pregnant and/or Parenting Youth have been incorporated into Polk County's Coordinated Community Plan:

- Boost availability and accessibility of adolescent parenting support, parent education, and other child abuse prevention programs and community initiatives.
- Expand child development supports and child care subsidies to better support pregnant and parenting youth.
- For pregnant and parenting youth, establish positive social groups and connections with other new or seasoned parents
- Develop programs for young parents dealing with mental illness postpartum



- Education classes to prepare pregnant young people for life skills and parenting
- Child care options, which may include off-site child care services provided through partner organizations
- Early childhood education and services, including child development and parent child playgroups for youth with children
- Access to culturally responsive prenatal care, including group care and individual care options
- Access to basic child care needs, including diapers, formula, and baby food

### JUSTICE-INVOLVED YOUTH DESCRIPTIONS/NEEDS

There is noted connection between involvement in the juvenile justice and homeless response system for American youth. In a national study, the Coalition for Juvenile Justice found that 44% of youth experiencing homelessness had previously stayed in a jail, prison, or juvenile detention center. Three-quarters (78%) of youth had at least one interaction with police (Pilnik, 2016). This intersection indicates that homelessness can lead to involvement with the justice system for Polk County youth and vice versa. For instance, youth experiencing homelessness, especially those that are unsheltered, may face trespassing or other charges, incur fines that they're not able to pay, or commit "survival crimes" to ensure their basic needs. Additionally, once the youth exits from juvenile detention their source of housing may no longer be available, they may struggle to reconnect with family or social network, and/or they may have limited resources with which to secure housing, thus becoming homeless.

**26%**

of Youth in HMIS Were  
 Previously a Ward of  
 the Juvenile Justice System

Local data aligns with national findings in the close connection between juvenile justice and homelessness for Polk County TAY. RHY data from 2018-2019 illustrates that 26% of youth in the system were previously a ward of the juvenile justice system. For many young people in our community, interaction with these systems is not a one-time event. In fact, 33% of Polk County juveniles were deemed reoffenders (Iowa Juvenile Delinquency", 2018). Repeated involvement with the juvenile

justice system makes achieving stable housing more difficult and heightens the risk for homelessness for these young people.

Our community continues to face inequity in the population of youth involved with the juvenile justice system. Of the total law violations in the state of Iowa among juveniles ages



10-17, 59% were Caucasian youth, 29% were African American, 7% were Hispanic, and 5% comprised of Asian, Native American, and other youth. Thus, 41% of youth involved in juvenile justice in Iowa in 2017 were youth of color (Iowa Juvenile Delinquency”, 2018). The juvenile justice system in our country and state overall also disproportionately impacts young males, making them an especially vulnerable population to becoming homeless following release from juvenile justice

Anecdotally, Polk County youth described barriers of employment background checks, high costs and legal fees, justice system penalties, and transportation to meetings as needs resulting from their interaction with the juvenile justice system. These complex challenges create intersectional barriers for youth as they work to connect to our Polk County community and maintain safe, stable housing. “Within twelve months of their release from institutional placement, only 30% of delinquent youth were involved in either school or employment. These youth are significantly more likely than their peers to have substance abuse or mental health challenges,” (Gaughen, 2019). Knowing how closely systems overlap in creating barriers for youth, it’s essential that we use our YHDP process to bring those same systems together in pursuit of collaborative solutions for justice-involved youth.

The following strategies related to Justice-Involved youth have been incorporated into Polk County’s Coordinated Community Plan:

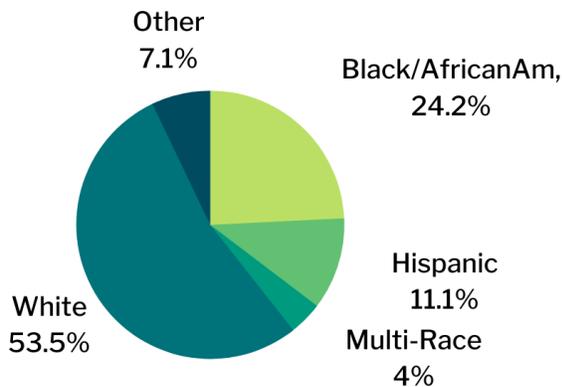
- Educate Guardians Ad Litem, judges, attorneys and others about the needs of youth as they exit care—particularly in relation to family dynamics and safe re-engagement with families.
- Seek resources to expand efforts of Juvenile Court Services (JCS) and Department of Human Services (DHS) to amplify the strengths of youth through comprehensive individualized exit planning and supportive services.
- Develop a best practice protocol question list for use by jails, hospitals, schools, doctor’s offices, etc. to identify and refer youth who are at high risk of homelessness that includes mental health, physical health and safety status.
- Explore housing options for youth who have felonies, sex offenses, mental health challenges, and other barriers that preclude them from many housing solutions.
- Increase access to legal advocacy programs that works with youth to obtain expungements, renter rights education, and other legal remedies to remove barriers



**FOSTER CARE-INVOLVED YOUTH DESCRIPTION/NEEDS**

Just as with juvenile justice, unfortunately, there’s a noted connection between the Child Welfare system and homelessness in our Polk County community. According to RHY data from 2016-2019, an average of 31% of youth experiencing homelessness were previously a ward of the child welfare (e.g. foster care) system. Polk County youth have shared anecdotally that some of the reasons for this connection are the trauma and lack of safety in the foster care system, the lack of extended family or adult support and general instability both personally and in their environment. The Iowa Department of Human Services reports that between 2016-2019, 343 Polk County youth aged 17 or older, aged out of the foster care system. It is these youth who are some of the most vulnerable in our community and often at the greatest risk for homelessness and other challenges. In fact, approximately 60% of youth who age out of foster care are involved in the juvenile justice system. Once again, Black/African American and Hispanic youth are heavily overrepresented in the foster care system in our community, as demonstrated in the chart below of the 343 youth who most recently aged out of care.

**FOSTER CARE-INVOLVED YOUTH**



Nearly half of the Youth Action Council has been involved with the juvenile justice or child welfare systems. Youth involved in these systems—and particularly youth who age out of these systems—are at high risk of becoming homeless. Iowa Aftercare Services Network and National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) data reveals that approximately 25% of youth who age out of foster care report becoming homeless before their 21st birthday. Youth who leave these systems at age 18 often do not have the positive social networks that improve stability and they report not having the opportunities to learn basic life skills or to develop a solid plan to equip them for the transition to

adulthood. Additionally, many youth have developmental and intellectual delays or mental health challenges that can make it more difficult to maintain housing. While rental subsidies and family unification vouchers for these young people are available, eligibility is limited and barriers to utilization exist.

Based on their involvement with the child welfare system, these young people have also experienced ACEs and trauma in their young lives, which put them at greater risk for additional barriers and challenges. According to the Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS), the most common reasons for entrance into the child welfare system include child



behavior, parent drug and alcohol use, neglect, abuse, incapacity, and inadequate housing. Without the proper treatment, support, and intervention, many youth will continue to struggle with this lack of stability. As True Colors United writes, “All youth in foster care are at higher risk of juvenile justice involvement, commercial sexual exploitation, and homelessness. Lack of affirming care and services heightens this risk for LGBTQ youth. Until child welfare systems provide for the safety, permanency, and well-being of LGBTQ youth in care, they will continue to fuel the over-representation of LGBTQ youth amongst youth experiencing homelessness,” (Price et al., 2019).

A survey of 17-year-old Iowa youth currently in foster care provides some additional insight into the complicating factors that lead to homelessness following involvement with child welfare. First, a limited income and opportunity to support themselves makes it hard to achieve stable housing unassisted at 17 or 18 years old. Of the youth surveyed, 26.3% of reported having either full-time or part-time employment (“Youth in Transition”, 2018). Data shows that a limited amount of Iowa youth in foster care are working because they are in school. In fact, 95.7% of participating youth are currently enrolled in and attending high school, GED classes, post-high school vocational training, or college. Beyond education and employment, we know that positive connections with adults can help reduce the risk of homelessness. Positively, 98% of participating youth reported having at least one adult in their life to whom they could go for advice or emotional support. However, in this area once again we see a disproportionate experience for youth of color. Approximately only 23% African-American youth reported having a positive connection with an adult other than their caseworker (“Youth in Transition”, 2018). This is not only a disheartening statistic but one that points to the importance of strong, stable networks for teens as they grow. Surveyed youth also reported having been referred for substance abuse assessment or counseling (37.1%) which is higher than the national average (27%) for 17-year-olds. Of participating youth who reported having been referred for substance abuse assessment or counseling, 40.8% were females and 59.2% were male. Approximately 23% of 17 year olds in foster care reported having been homeless. Nationally, 16% of 17-year-olds reported having an experience with homelessness (“Youth in Transition”, 2018).

The following strategies related to Child Welfare-Involved youth have been incorporated into Polk County’s Coordinated Community Plan:

- Educate Guardians Ad Litem, judges, attorneys and others about the needs of youth as they exit care—particularly in relation to family dynamics and safe re-engagement with families.
- Promote adolescent brain development, self-determination, and positive relationships by ensuring youth have quality Youth Transition Decision Making (YTDM) meetings focusing on strong housing plans and identifying people for long-term support.



- Seek resources to expand efforts of Juvenile Court Services (JCS) and Department of Human Services (DHS) to amplify the strengths of youth through comprehensive individualized exit planning and supportive services.
- Advocate for the extension of foster care from age 18 to 21 to ensure safety and stability for emerging adults
- Develop model to provide permanent housing with support for youth aging out of care—with subsidized rent through Family Unification Program, Preparation for Adult Living (PAL), rent subsidy through Iowa Finance Authority, or private funding sources
- Evaluate Family Unification Program (FUP) voucher priority levels and expand when possible to maximize its use for transitioning youth.
- Explore self-sufficiency classes to develop independence for older foster care kids (while still in care to prepare them for the transition)

### **VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING AND EXPLOITATION DESCRIPTION AND NEEDS**

Due to its location at the crossroads of two major interstates and the variety of large tournaments and sporting events in the county, Des Moines is one of the top 100 trafficking sites in the U.S. (“Iowa Spotlight”, 2018). While the community has taken steps to address the prevalence of sex and labor trafficking, the problem is still largely under identified and under reported.

According to the National Human Trafficking Hotline, the top five risk factors for human trafficking are recent migration/relocation, substance use, unstable housing, runaway/homeless youth, and mental health concerns. Each of these complex issues intertwine in the lives of youth experiencing homelessness, making them highly vulnerable to sex and labor trafficking in our community. Data reported in HMIS from 2018-2019 reveals that 8% of TAY had been sexually exploited/sex trafficked while 5% of TAY reported labor exploitation/trafficking.

On a larger scale, 102 cases of trafficking were reported in Iowa in 2018 (“National Human Trafficking Hotline”, 2018) but many more individuals have likely been victimized by physical and emotional abuse, threats, isolation, and economic abuse. For youth experiencing homelessness who have been trafficked, there are additional layers of trauma in the quest for safe, stable housing. Polk County youth report that the lack of safety, fear of further victimization, and insufficient knowledge of services and programs are the biggest hurdles to overcoming trafficking and achieving housing stability. By investing in a healing-centered approach to help youth achieve physical, mental, and emotional security, our system can make an impact for youth who have experienced trafficking and exploitation as they pursue stable housing.



The following strategies related to Trafficking-Involved youth have been incorporated into Polk County's Coordinated Community Plan:

- At intake, continue to screen youth for human trafficking, sexual assault, domestic violence, physical violence and substance abuse, and immediately connect them to needed supports and services.
- Teach youth skills to avoid trafficking and help identify dangerous situations and potential threats
- Invest in STD testing and treatment for all youth-- specifically those with a history of trafficking or exploitation
- Explore partnerships to bring in animal therapy programs for youth as a healing-centered approach to past trauma

### **YOUTH OF COLOR DESCRIPTION/STRATEGIES**

Nationally, black or African American youth had an 83% higher risk of being homeless while Hispanic youth had a 33% higher risk (Dworsky et al., 2018). Polk County data mirrors the national risk data with a gross overrepresentation of youth of color in the homeless system. This disparity is especially clear in the distinction between youth individuals and youth families. In Polk County Emergency Shelter and Transitional Housing, 61% of families with head of households under 25 are Black or African American. Meanwhile, only 29% of singles under 25 are black or African American. Black women in particular are heavily overrepresented. Of households where the head of household is under 25, 66% are female meaning that the majority of Polk County families in Emergency Shelter and Transitional Housing are led by black women.

Racial disparity is not only shown in the data, but in the way young people in Polk County experience the homeless response system. Youth report discrimination in housing services and programs, both explicitly stated or through implicit bias in the community. It's clear that people of color experience homelessness in Polk County differently and perhaps often lack equitable access to services and supports. Some issues also relate to the complex ties between race and economic achievement in our nation. Young people of color in the Polk County community describe access to transportation and the wealth gap (as compared to white peers) as additional barriers to stable housing and employment. While these barriers don't have a simple solution, by examining systemic issues and addressing the root causes of inequity, we can hope to create a better, more culturally inclusive experience for youth of color in Polk County.

The following strategies related to Youth of Color have been incorporated into Polk County's Coordinated Community Plan:



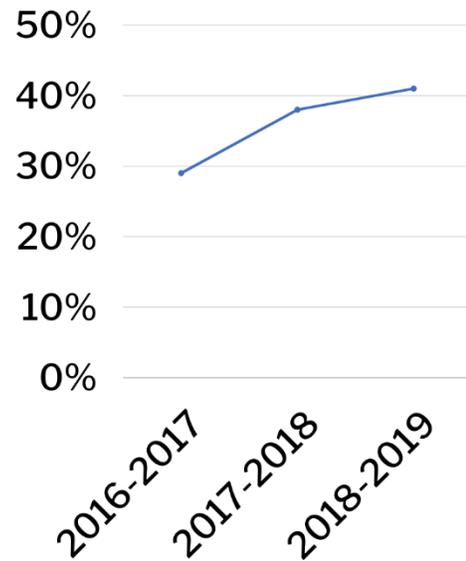
- Work with the Polk County Continuum of Care Racial Equity group to analyze root causes of housing disparities for black and brown youth.
- Build on One Economy: Building Opportunity for All, The State of Black Polk County report to focus on efforts to improve the lives of black youth and families.
- Build racial diversity in the YAC
- Enhance racial diversity in staff for youth housing and supportive services
- Develop connections to church/faith communities and cultural organizations for youth to grow their social networks and support systems
- Empower youth to take political action to combat racism and bias in local and federal laws and policies
- Host classes at youth programs to explore different cultures, arts, and food

**YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES DESCRIPTION AND NEEDS**

According to the Iowa Youth Survey, of all Iowa 11th graders, 17% in 2018 reported having an ongoing physical, mental, or emotional disability or impairment. For Polk County youth experiencing homelessness, this percentage is even higher— and it’s on the rise. In 2016-2017, 29% of youth 18-24 identified as having a disabling condition in the Polk County HMIS. By 2017-2018, it was 38%, and in 2018-2019 41% of young adults in the HMIS system reported having a disability. Of the youth who identified as having a disability, mental health issues were the most prevalent with 56% of respondents in 2018-2019 followed by substance abuse, developmental disability, physical disability, and HIV/AIDS.

**YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES**

In Polk County HMIS



The homeless response system can be challenging to navigate for people with disabilities. Safe, affordable and accessible housing is rare. Physical, mental, emotional, or learning disabilities, often go untreated, undiagnosed, or require complex and expensive services. The National Center on Family Homelessness reported that children who are homeless, as compared to other children, have three times the rate of emotional and behavioral problems, are four times more likely to show delayed development, and have twice the rate of learning disabilities (“Supporting Homeless Children”, 2015). Knowing this



tight correlation between homelessness and disabilities, it's crucial to direct additional study and resources to support youth with the appropriate housing to meet their needs.

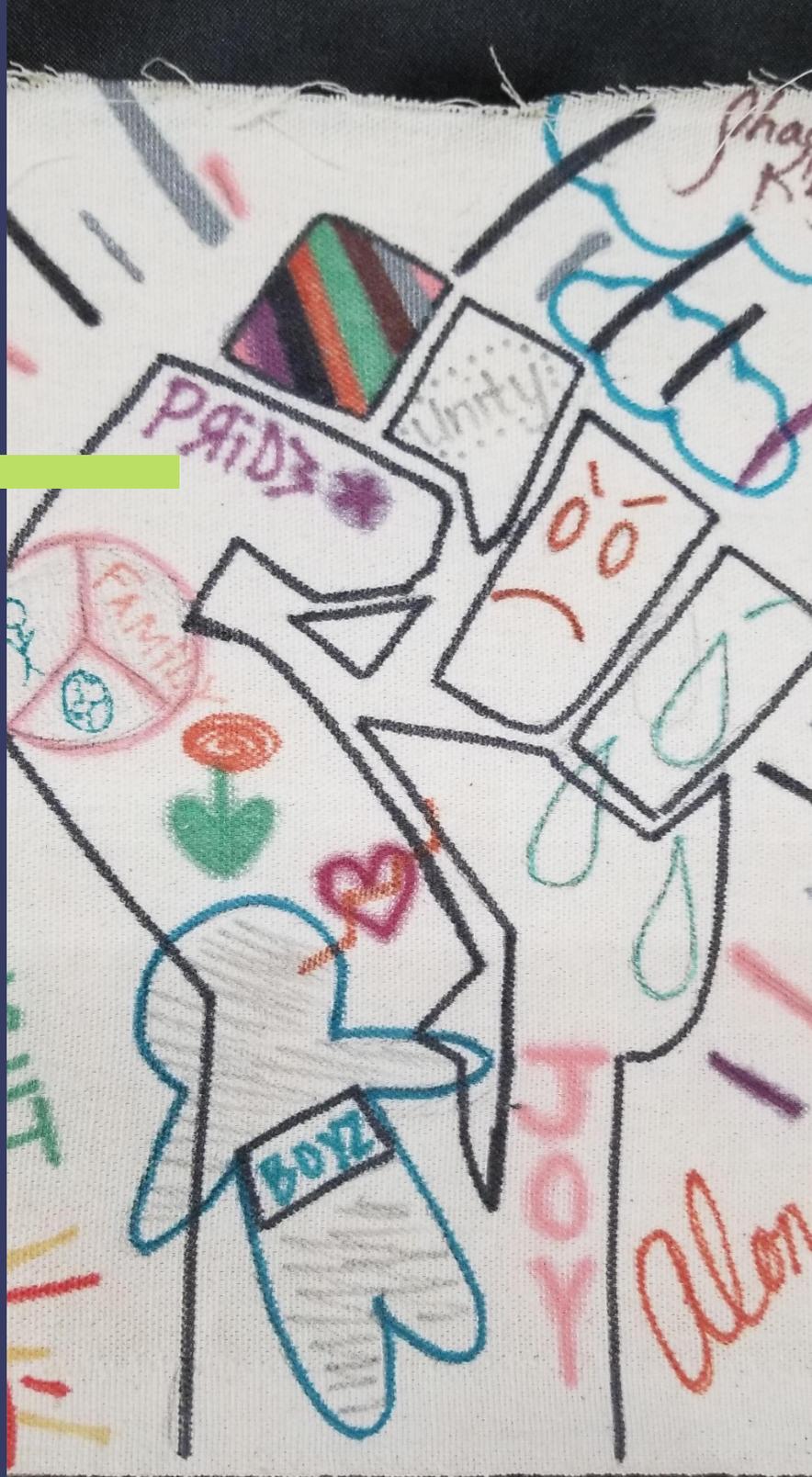
The following strategies related to Youth with Disabilities have been incorporated into Polk County's Coordinated Community Plan:

- Invest in housing options that support youth with severe mental illness or developmental disabilities
- Explore infrastructure accommodations at shelters and housing programs for varying motor function handicaps
- Offer physical therapy and sports for those with disabilities within supportive services
- Transportation- bus tokens and passes, but also specific support for those with disabilities



**SECTION 5**

**OUR  
GUIDING  
PRINCIPLES**



*Art by Polk County Youth Action Council Members*



## POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

According to the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs, Positive Youth Development is an intentional, prosocial approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances young people's strengths; and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths. Polk County's YHDP process is driven by the principles of Positive Youth Development (PYD) to ensure that youth in our homeless response system achieve physical and psychological safety and security and thrive into adulthood. Moreover, we intentionally designed each YHDP project to contain the following PYD elements:

- Supportive adult relationships
- Opportunities to form close, durable human relationships with peers that support and reinforce healthy behaviors
- A sense of belonging and personal value
- Opportunities to develop positive social values and norms
- Opportunities for skill building and mastery
- Opportunities to develop confidence in abilities to and mastery in environment
- Opportunities to make a contribution to the community and to develop a sense of mattering
- Strong links between families, schools, and broader community resources

Beyond the Positive Youth Development principles infused in our YHDP projects and planning, the Polk County Youth Action Council is also grounded in PYD to create better outcomes for our youth leaders. As a matter of practice, this philosophy means that our YHDP youth work provides clear expectations for young people, as well as increasing opportunities to make decisions, to participate in governance and rule-making, and to take on leadership roles as members mature and gain more expertise.

Other strategies to integrate Positive Youth Development into the Polk County youth homeless response system include:

- Promote adolescent brain development, self-determination, and positive relationships by ensuring youth who age out of foster care have quality Youth Transition Decision Making (YTDM) meetings focusing on strong housing plans and identifying people for long-term support.
- Develop a network of support to ensure Polk County youth have connections to family, community, school, mentorship, and other social supports.
- Invest in after school programs and mentorship between community members and youth



- Invest in a YAC-driven program guide of standards and principles to best support the unique developmental needs of youth
- Create a county-wide culture of positive youth development
- Fund trainings for system providers on Positive Youth Development (PYD) and create training guides to carry learning forward.
- Research and implement a simple evaluation for all Polk County CoC partners to ensure programming meets healing-centered care principles.
- Support the positive youth development of LGBTQ YYA

**TRAUMA-INFORMED AND HEALING-CENTERED CARE**

A healing-centered approach views trauma not simply as an individual isolated experience, but rather highlights the ways in which trauma and healing are experienced collectively through events and environments, and offers a strengths based, holistic approach to fostering well-being involving culture, spirituality, civic action and collective healing. Through the YHDP planning process, our community has highlighted the high number of youth and young adults who have experienced trauma. Our YHDP Stakeholders group has at length discussed how these traumas impact adolescent development and affect young adults’ priorities and responses to services—and service barriers. This work

POLK COUNTY YHDP

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES #1

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**POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

An intentional, prosocial approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive.

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**TRAUMA-INFORMED & HEALING-CENTERED CARE**

A healing-centered approach views trauma not simply as an individual isolated experience, but rather highlights the ways in which trauma and healing are experienced collectively through events and environments, and offers a strengths-based approach.

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**FAMILY ENGAGEMENT**

For youth experiencing housing instability, family engagement can provide the sense of belonging and nurturing youth need to thrive.

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**HOUSING FIRST**

In a Housing First system, assistance and housing is offered to youth without preconditions or barriers to entry such as treatment or service participation requirements.



informed the development of healing-centered project priorities and supportive services to better serve youth through a trauma-informed lens using YHDP funding. But we also know that to be truly impactful, the work of trauma informed care must extend into existing youth-serving programs and become the standard practice for our homeless response system. That's why Polk County's coordinated community plan includes action steps to provide ongoing healing-centered care training for planners and service providers and ensure that all existing and future programs include trauma informed care with a healing centered approach.

Other strategies to integrate Trauma-informed/Healing-Center Care into the Polk County youth homeless response system include:

- Seek resources to expand efforts of Juvenile Court Services (JCS) and Department of Human Services (DHS) to amplify the strengths of youth through comprehensive individualized exit planning and supportive services.
- The community will provide opportunities and supports that are healing-centered and responsive to the individual strengths of youth experiencing homelessness.
- Create a county-wide culture of trauma informed care
- Fund trainings for system providers on Trauma Informed/Healing Centered Care and create training guides to carry learning forward.
- Research and implement a simple evaluation for all Polk County CoC partners to ensure programming meets healing-centered care principles.

## **FAMILY ENGAGEMENT**

Families are the foundation of personal well-being and can be a source for both challenges, and solutions to housing stability. For youth experiencing housing instability, family engagement can provide the sense of belonging and nurturing youth need to thrive. Through our YHDP planning process, it's been imperative to offer young people healthy and mediated opportunities to reunite with family and friends, when desired. Safe, sustainable family connections for young people are crucial to the Polk County YHDP work and our homeless response system overall.

Specific strategies to integrate Family Engagement into the Polk County youth homeless response system include:

- Keep families safe and together, whenever possible
- Increase access to evidence-based family therapies that support positive family connections, build problem-solving and communication skills, and address youth substance abuse and other maladaptive behaviors.



- Incorporate system-wide rapid resolution/diversion efforts to keep families together and/or help connect youth with chosen family supports.
- Boost availability and accessibility of adolescent parenting support, parent education, and other child abuse prevention programs and community initiatives.
- Expand child development supports and child care subsidies to better support pregnant and parenting youth.
- Provide support and resources for parents and families with LGBTQ youth
- Create training on family reconnection skills with support and direction from YAC

### **HOUSING FIRST- IMMEDIATE ACCESS TO HOUSING WITH NO PRECONDITIONS**

In a Housing First system, assistance and housing is offered to youth without preconditions or barriers to entry such as treatment or service participation requirements. This includes referrals to appropriate services, access to intensive, youth-focused case management and other services. This evidence-based practice has been foundational to all Polk County Continuum of Care members. However, the YHDP process has given our community the powerful opportunity to deepen our understanding about how to incorporate and expand our Housing First principles to programs and services that support youth and young adults. Based on Stakeholder and youth input, our community has learned the crucial importance of building an array of crisis and permanent housing options for Des Moines area residents with no preconditions. YHDP projects are therefore designed to be no barrier, with access to housing and voluntary supports to increase positive outcomes for Polk County youth.

Other strategies to integrate Immediate Access to Housing into the Polk County youth homeless response system include:

- Improve identification and referral of youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness to available services
- Develop a best practice question list for use by jails, hospitals, schools, doctor's offices, etc. to identify and refer youth who are at high risk of homelessness that includes mental health, physical health and safety status.
- At intake, continue to screen youth for human trafficking, sexual assault, domestic violence, physical violence and substance abuse, and immediately connect them to needed supports and services.
- Maintain a By-Name List of homeless youth through Polk County Continuum of Care Board work group to ensure youth are quickly connected to case management services, housing and other supportive services and relationships.
- The community will rapidly link youth and young adults with safe, affordable, and low-barrier housing of their choice with voluntary supports.



## YOUTH CHOICE

Youth voice and choice are inherent within each of our YHDP guiding principles to ensure authentic youth collaboration and better long-term outcomes for young people. While we know that youth choice is a best practice for all organizations serving young people, many systems including education, juvenile justice, and child welfare may not always provide regular opportunities for young people to set goals and lead decision-making processes. By prioritizing youth choice via YHDP in our community, we can help Polk County youth realize their own life goals and preferences. Moreover, valuing and integrating youth choice helps our homeless response system design innovative housing and supportive services projects that best meet youth's developmental strengths and needs. This practice not only improves housing outcomes, but provides youth with the tools and confidence they need to be successful in other areas of life.

For our Polk County community specifically, the Youth Action Council is a key advocate— and vehicle for—youth voice and choice. These young leaders have helped guide the development of YHDP projects to ensure youth choice is a key element of each project type. Moving forward, YAC members will take an even greater role in setting meeting agendas and determining group priorities. By providing these members with choice, our community can ensure their voices are heard, their preferences imbedded into CoC projects, and that they have the confidence to continue to develop leadership and advocacy skills.

Other strategies to integrate Youth Choice into the Polk County youth homeless response system include:

- Communicate with Polk County youth to make them aware of housing services and supports
- Develop a youth-focused/youth-driven publicity campaign around how to access services
- Continue to promote youth voice via ongoing social/emotional health conversations and youth-led case planning
- The community will rapidly link youth and young adults with safe, affordable, and low-barrier housing of their choice with voluntary supports.
- Provide Youth Action Council members with ongoing trainings on leadership, meeting facilitation, and community concepts to empower them to lead and set goals for the future



## INDIVIDUALIZED AND CLIENT-DRIVEN SUPPORT

To prevent and end youth homelessness in Polk County, we know it's crucial to prioritize individualized, youth-driven housing and supportive services for our community. With that in mind, our Coordinated Community Plan takes into account the individual needs of all youth, including special populations, who are currently experiencing or at-risk of homelessness. From youth choice in the types of housing programs they participate in, to customized voluntary supportive services with youth-determined goals for success, our vision for the homeless response system is to treat each client as a unique individual with unique needs and strengths. Our YHDP projects are designed to help uplift the strengths of youth while helping them develop in the areas of life they've chosen for themselves. We know that no two youth are exactly the same, and thus our Coordinated Community Plan creates space to support individualized paths to permanent housing. As we move forward in the YHDP process, individualized and youth-driven supports will remain at the forefront of all review processes and will help to inform Continuous Quality Improvement efforts.

Other strategies to integrate Individualized and Client-Driven Support into Polk County's youth homeless response system include:

- Build on the existing array of Polk County housing options and supports to meet each youth's individualized needs
- Dedicate Permanent Supportive Housing units for youth, young adults and young families that do not include chronicity requirements.
- Expand housing resources for youth who are doubled up; either living with family, friends, or other non-relatives
- Expand Rapid Rehousing programs—particularly longer term (24 months)—to rapidly connect youth and young families experiencing homelessness to stable housing with supportive services and financial support.
- Create a “Youth Housing Navigator” position that works specifically with youth and young adults under age 25 who aren't eligible for other programs or for those who age out of care
- Expand housing options that reflect the strengths and needs of young adults who have had juvenile justice and child welfare involvement
- Support the complex mental/behavioral health needs of youth through connections to comprehensive services
- Address barriers to youth accessing mental health services including transportation hurdles and explore flexibility of bringing services to youth
- Invest in housing options that support youth with severe mental illness or developmental disabilities
- Provide support to Polk County youth in their personal development and goal setting and provide adequate resources to attain those goals



**SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY INTEGRATION**

POLK COUNTY YHDP

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES #2

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**YOUTH CHOICE**

An intentional, prosocial approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive.

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**INDIVIDUALIZED AND CLIENT-DRIVEN SUPPORT**

Our Coordinated Community Plan takes into account the individual needs of all youth, including special populations, who are currently experiencing or at-risk of homelessness.



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**SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY INTEGRATION**

These social and community connections will help each YYA to transition into healthy and productive adulthood while developing a sense of purpose through peer groups, volunteerism, work, arts, education, recreation, and chosen activities.

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**CENTRALIZED INTAKE**

Polk County's Centralized Intake system is designed to limit the re-traumatization that can occur from multiple forms of outreach and assessment.



It's crucial that we support our youth and young adults with connections to their community for both their own social development and for the future strength of Polk County. Thus, a key factor to success for our YHDP work is ensuring youth feel a sense of connection and integration in Greater Des Moines. YAC members and Stakeholders have identified an overall system-level goal to create opportunities for community connection, socialization, and skill building within each housing project. These social and community connections will help each YYA to transition into healthy and productive adulthood while developing a sense of purpose through peer groups, volunteerism, work, arts, education,

recreation, and chosen activities. For many young people, homelessness can be an isolating experience. It's our job as a community to connect youth with peers and adult mentors as well as other community figures to ease this isolation, and provide youth with a network of social support during their housing instability and well into the future.

Other strategies to integrate Social and Community Integration into the youth homeless response system include:

- Identify vulnerable students and their families within the Polk County school system
- Provide YYA with positive social development opportunities



- For pregnant and parenting youth, establish positive social groups and connections with other new or seasoned parents
- Create opportunities for youth to meaningfully engage in their community, including volunteerism and peer mentorship
- Provide youth with ongoing opportunities for self-care, bonding, and social and recreational options with their peers

## CENTRALIZED INTAKE

Polk County's Centralized Intake system is designed to limit the re-traumatization that can occur from multiple forms of outreach and assessment. Therefore, all interventions for youth experiencing homelessness will be linked to Centralized Intake to maintain the trauma-informed principles of the YHDP and serve youth as quickly and effectively as possible. The current Centralized Intake process intentionally incorporates youth via a YYA-specific housing triage tool, the Transition Aged Youth Vulnerability Index-Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (TAY-VI-SPDAT). Once a youth is identified, they may complete the TAY VI-SPDAT or the Family VI-SPDAT for households with children in arms. While completing intake, care is given to identify the unique strengths and needs of youth, utilizing the principles of trauma-informed care and positive youth development. Youth are then referred to appropriate services based on their prioritization score and qualitative data collected during the Centralized Intake conversation.

The YHDP process has helped our community identify some ways in which the Centralized Intake process can work even better for youth experiencing homelessness. Because YHDP projects will be required to accept referrals via Centralized Intake, it's crucial that the process is youth appropriate, accurate, and effective. Our community's vision is that through collective action, we can effectively link all youth experiencing homelessness to housing and services solutions that are tailored to their needs through the use of the Centralized Intake.

Other strategies to better integrate Centralized Intake into Polk County's youth homeless response system include:

- Develop partnerships between the Polk County Continuum of Care and school districts that provide cross-discipline learning opportunities between schools, Centralized Intake, and homeless service providers.
- Ensure Polk County is a data-informed community by collecting information across multiple systems to better understand YYA at-risk of or experiencing homelessness
- Identify opportunities for county-wide data sharing across sectors (homeless response system, schools, JCS, DHS, etc.) to track vulnerable students



## **Polk County Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program**

### COORDINATED COMMUNITY PLAN

- Assess the current Centralized Intake process and determine ongoing efforts to make Centralized Intake highly functional, accessible and youth-friendly.
- Evaluate Transition-Age-Youth VI-SPDAT effectiveness and explore options to maximize data quality and accuracy
- Ensure initial intake assessments gather information regarding connections with supportive adults
- Continue to assess Transition-Age-Youth VI-SPDAT for cultural and racial bias through the Polk County CoC Race Equity Work Group.



**SECTION 6**

**APPENDIX**



*Art by Polk County Youth Action Council Members*



## **YHDP KEY PARTNERS DESCRIPTION**

### **CoC Board**

The Polk County Continuum of Care has served as the collaborative applicant for YHDP funding along with the City of Des Moines. Throughout the YHDP planning process, the CoC has worked to ensure the development of a successful Coordinated Community Plan by acting as an integral member and facilitator of the YHDP Steering Committee and hiring additional staff specifically to support YHDP. CoC leadership works to ensure that youth voice is present at meetings and informs the work of YHDP project development. As a coordinating body that helps set the community-wide strategy for homelessness, the Polk County CoC has had the unique opportunity to form a community-wide YHDP stakeholders group comprised of service providers, youth, community organizations, government partners, and more. Additionally, the Polk County CoC will have a very active role in the future of Des Moines' YHDP work by providing relevant training to providers and grant recipients as well as serving as a leader in workgroups to move CCP action items forward in the community.

### **Youth Action Council**

The Des Moines/Polk County Youth Action Council (YAC) served as leaders and advisors throughout the YHDP planning and application process. The YAC is comprised of young people in our community under the age of 25 who are experiencing or have experienced homelessness. Created in 2017, the YAC has quickly become a crucial partner in the effort to end and prevent youth homelessness in Polk County. YAC members attended each YHDP community stakeholder meeting, providing crucial perspective and helping to shape our community's Coordinated Community Plan. Additionally, in bi-monthly meetings, YAC members have consistently worked on portions of the YHDP requirements including project design and continuous quality improvement planning. The YAC will continue to serve as advisors to the YHDP Coordinated Community Plan by evaluating proposals, interviewing project applicants, partnering in continuous quality improvement, and spreading awareness of YHDP and available resources. YAC leaders have become vocal advocates for Des Moines area youth and affordable housing, speaking with a variety of community groups, legislators, a University class, and, and even local media. The Polk County CoC will continue to work in partnership with the YAC to evaluate progress toward our goal of preventing and ending youth homelessness through the YHDP process and beyond.



## **Local and State Government**

As the collaborative applicant, the City of Des Moines has been a crucial partner in YHDP development. City representatives, including the Mayor of Des Moines, have been engaged on the CoC Board, various workgroups, the YHDP Steering Committee, and community Stakeholders meetings. By intentionally engaging the city from the start, our CCP has worked to build on existing housing resources and create truly systemic solutions to youth barriers. In particular, the City's Community Development department has provided weekly housing development support and advice in regards to potential projects. The Des Moines City Council has been another strong partner in YHDP efforts via regular presentations and project updates to city leadership. We look forward to partnering further with our city, county, and state government to implement and evaluate the success of YHDP projects and advocate for the needs of young people

## **Public Child Welfare Agency**

Iowa's Public Child Welfare Agency, the Department of Human Services (DHS) has been involved throughout the YHDP process to provide ongoing input, support and collaboration of resources. Early on in the YHDP planning process, data indicated there was a close correlation between involvement in child welfare and youth homelessness in our community. Thus, DHS was invited to participate at the beginning of the grant process. A DHS transition planning specialist served on the Steering Committee, meeting weekly to craft YHDP strategies and ensure projects met the needs of those young people transitioning out of DHS care. Additionally, YHDP leadership met and regularly communicated with the DHS Des Moines Service Area Manager to solicit feedback on CCP development and ideas as to how the child welfare system can better collaborate with other youth-serving systems. With several DHS and aftercare representatives involved in community stakeholder meetings, we were able to gain a clear picture of the barriers system-involved youth face—and the potential solutions to those barriers our community can provide. Looking forward, DHS will continue to be a close partner as implementation of YHDP action items begin. The CoC, YHDP Leadership, and DHS will continue working with youth to evaluate progress toward child welfare housing and support goals.

## A LETTER FROM THE POLK COUNTY CONTINUUM OF CARE BOARD CHAIR

As the chair of the Polk County Continuum of Care Board, I am pleased to support the YHDP Coordinated Community Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness. The collective Polk County Continuum of Care appreciates the opportunity to work collaboratively with the Department of Housing and Urban Development and our greater Des Moines community to develop a comprehensive and authentic approach to ending youth homelessness in Polk County.

This work is so crucial to us as the Continuum of Care because we believe our young people deserve a foundation of safe, healthy, stable housing and opportunities to thrive. After years of youth-specific housing and supportive services work in our community, the Continuum of Care is thrilled to endorse this Coordinated Community Plan (CCP) that strategically addresses the strengths and needs of our youth. The plan prioritizes prevention, early identification, pathways out of homelessness, social development, learning opportunities, and removing systemic barriers to housing stability for young adults. We know that if we work together, we can make this CCP vision a reality for all Polk County youth.

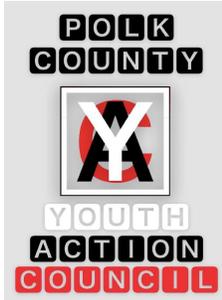
The Polk County Continuum of Care Board strongly supports the established Youth Action Council (YAC) and their involvement throughout the planning process of the CCP. As an integral, working committee, the YAC members have become community leaders for our Board—and for our community. We believe consistent feedback from the YAC is critical for the success of the Coordinated Community Plan implementation and all efforts to prevent and end youth homelessness. We will continue to foster an environment for youth voice, engagement, and partnership to lead the way in our community.

As the Continuum of Care Board moves forward with the implementation of YHDP in greater Des Moines, we will continue to coordinate existing resources, establish partnerships, host stakeholder feedback sessions with youth and community members, facilitate workgroups, and participate in data-sharing. The COC Board is very grateful for the opportunity to work directly with HUD as a selected YHDP community, and we thank you for your continued partnership and investment in our young people. We're proud to be a partner in this community-wide effort and look forward to implementing our plan in the coming months to ensure everyone in Polk County has a safe place to call home.

Sincerely,



Susan E. Wright, Chair



## A LETTER FROM THE YOUTH ACTION COUNCIL

We are writing today in support of the YHDP Coordinated Community Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness for Polk County, Iowa. We agree to continue to work collaboratively with our community as outlined in the plan and serve as leaders throughout the YHDP project implementation process.

The Des Moines Youth Action Council (YAC) have been partners throughout the entire YHDP process, providing space for everyone's ideas to be validated and heard. We've collaborated with each other and with Polk County community stakeholders to create authentic ideas to end youth homelessness. YAC has assisted with the creation of the Coordinated Community Plan (CCP) and reviewed content throughout every stage. We provided feedback to the plan's goals and objectives, drafted the needs of special populations, and identified gaps in service that YHDP programming could meet. YHDP projects were then prioritized according to YAC members' needs, strengths, and experiences within the Polk County homeless response system. We now look forward to ensuring youth voice and decision making are included at every step of YHDP implementation and evaluation.

The Youth Action Council YHDP meetings have provided opportunities for members to come together, share experiences, and develop as unique, individual leaders. Our work has inspired us to develop a system for the young people in Des Moines to gain access to housing and support services and achieve their goals. We envision spreading our activism as YHDP continues to make a difference in Polk County for generations of youth to come.

Sincerely,

A collection of handwritten signatures in blue ink. The signatures are arranged in two columns. The left column contains: "Sally Bohannon", "Shirley Brunsman", "Justi Fineman", and "James Ramos". The right column contains: "Michael Meeth", "Branna Hagenow", and a signature that appears to be "Branna Hagenow" with a large flourish.

## **A LETTER FROM THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AGENCY**

The City of Des Moines, Iowa is pleased to support the YHDP Coordinated Community Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness. Our local city government appreciates the opportunity to work collaboratively with the Department of Housing and Urban Development and our greater Des Moines community to develop a comprehensive and authentic approach to ending youth homelessness in our community.

We believe the young people of Des Moines deserve a foundation of safe, healthy, stable housing and opportunities to thrive. We know that if we work together, we can make this vision a reality through our Coordinated Community Plan (CCP). Various Des Moines City staff have contributed to the CCP's strategy through stakeholder meetings, Steering Committee leadership, Continuum of Care Board Service, and City Council briefings. These leaders have contributed their time, knowledge, and vision to address the unique strengths and needs of Des Moines area young people.

The Des Moines City Council strongly supports the established Youth Action Council (YAC) and their involvement throughout the planning process of the CCP. As an integral, working committee, the YAC members have become community leaders for our city, even meeting with the Mayor of Des Moines to discuss their experiences. We believe consistent feedback from the YAC is critical for the success of the Coordinated Community Plan implementation and all efforts to prevent and end youth homelessness in Des Moines.

As the YHDP work moves forward, we're proud to be a partner in this community-wide effort and look forward to implementing projects in the coming months. The signature below attests to the approval and support for the Coordinated Community Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness. The City of Des Moines pledges to continue the efforts to address youth homelessness alongside the Polk County Continuum of Care, the Youth Action Council, and Des Moines community partners.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Chris Johansen".

Chris Johansen, Director  
Community Development Department  
City of Des Moines

## A LETTER FROM THE PUBLIC CHILD WELFARE AGENCY

I write to express my support for the Polk County Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) Coordinated Community Plan (CCP) to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness. The Iowa Department of Human Services endorses the CCP and its strategic work to ensure all young people have safe, stable homes and opportunities to succeed. By investing in YHDP housing and supportive services projects, our community can ensure youth have necessary resources to achieve housing stability and reach their goals. These efforts align with the Department of Human Service's overall long-term vision for Polk County youth and families to be healthy, safe and thriving.

The Coordinated Community Plan represents a truly collaborative effort among Des Moines service providers, youth, government partners, HUD, and of course, the Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS). DHS child welfare staff have contributed to the CCP's strategy through stakeholder meetings, Steering Committee leadership, Continuum of Care Board Service, and a DHS leadership briefing. These individuals have contributed their time, knowledge, and vision to address the unique strengths and needs of Des Moines youth involved in the child welfare system. Crucially, the CCP also centers young people in the design and oversight of all activities. Youth with lived experiences will be critical to ensuring that the most urgent resources are directed most effectively within our community. Furthermore, the CCP identifies detailed, actionable goals related to system-involved youth and intends to outline best practices to share with others to prevent and end young adult homelessness in Des Moines and beyond.

YHDP demonstrates a significant investment to end youth homelessness in Polk County and I look forward to partnering further with community members and youth as we work to implement the plan. The signature below attests to the approval and support for the Des Moines Coordinated Community Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness. The Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS) pledges to continue the efforts to prevent and end youth homelessness in Polk County.

Sincerely,



Jana Rhoads





Live. Give. Better Together.

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[www.desmoinesfoundation.org](http://www.desmoinesfoundation.org)



Confirmed in Compliance with  
National Standards  
for U.S. Community Foundations

June 8, 2020

To Whom it May Concern:

Central Iowa is a community focused on building sustainable solutions with a strong foundation rooted in collaborative spirit. This spirit is alive and well in our collective work to impact the lives of youth in our community who are homeless or facing the possibility of homelessness. The Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines is pleased to support the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Project (YHDP) Coordinated Community Plan (CCP) to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness in Polk County and is excited about the partnership potential between the Department of Housing and Urban Development and our Greater Des Moines community.

The CCP represents a truly collaborative effort among staff, leaders, local funders, community health and service providers, youth specific-providers, government partners, HUD, and the Youth Action Council. We are excited to know that the CCP will continue to center youth in YHDP programming so young people with lived experience are partners in decision-making. As YHDP projects move forward, the Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines will work with our community to elevate the need for young people to have the resources they need to grow, thrive, and reach their goals.

We believe we are simply better together, and together we can transform our community for generations of youth to come.

Sincerely,

Angela Dethlefs-Trettin  
Chief Community Impact Officer



April 6, 2020

Mid-Iowa Health Foundation is pleased to support the YHDP Coordinated Community Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness in Polk County. The Foundation appreciates the opportunity to work collaboratively with the Department of Housing and Urban Development and our greater Des Moines community to develop a comprehensive and authentic approach to ending youth homelessness.

This work is so crucial to us as Mid-Iowa Health Foundation because we believe our young people deserve safe, healthy, stable housing and opportunities to thrive. By addressing the root causes of youth homelessness, we can improve the health of vulnerable people in greater Des Moines, leading to a stronger community for all. After years of work surrounding the social determinants of health for young people, Mid-Iowa Health Foundation is thrilled to endorse this Coordinated Community Plan (CCP) that strategically addresses the strengths and needs of our youth.

From our initial funding support and participation in the Youth Action Council, we continue to appreciate that the CCP represents a truly collaborative effort among staff, leaders, community health and service providers, youth specific-providers, government partners, HUD, and the Youth Action Council. We are excited to know that CCP will continue to center youth in YHDP programming so that young people with lived experience are partners in decision making. As YHDP grant work moves forward, Mid-Iowa Health Foundation will work to ensure our children and youth are surrounded by a safe and supportive community, have access to quality health and educational services, and are protected from toxic forms of adversity. We know that if we work together, we can make this CCP vision a reality for all Polk County youth.

Warm regards,

Suzanne Mineck

Suzanne Mineck  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Polk County YHDP leadership team would like to thank the huge array of individuals, community partners, and organizations that have helped craft our Coordinated Community Plan. More than 80 partners and stakeholders have contributed their time, energy, and expertise to ensure that the YHDP process is as inclusive, strategic, and collaborative as possible. We'd love to take a moment to acknowledge the work of the following individuals and organizations who have helped our community progress in the work to prevent and end youth homelessness.

First and foremost, we thank all youth and young adults who have shared their knowledge and passion in the YHDP planning process, including our Youth Advisory Board (YAC) members. This authentic youth partnership has been the most important part of the YHDP process and will undoubtedly lead our community to a stronger, healthier homeless response system. YAC members have consistently advocated for the diverse strengths and needs of Polk County youth as they seek safe, stable housing and bright futures ahead.

Beyond our youth partners, we want to acknowledge the many community members, system partners, providers, government officials, and private funders who have informed the development of the YHDP CCP. These various stakeholders have spent hours strategically working to make Polk County youth and young adult homelessness a rare, brief, and one-time experience. We would further like to thank this diverse group of individuals, organizations and community leaders who work tirelessly each day to support our young people. We're grateful for their contributed time and resources and look forward to working with these partners to implement Polk County's Coordinated Community Plan.

Lastly, we'd like to thank all members of our YHDP decision-making bodies: the Youth Advisory Council, the Polk County Continuum of Care Board of Directors, and the YHDP Steering Committee who have contributed many hours of strategizing, partnership, and story/experience sharing. We appreciate their commitment in drafting funded projects, supporting continuous quality improvement, and continuing to address the strengths and needs of young people in our community. These leaders have stepped up in extraordinary ways to innovate and push our community forward. We're lucky to have them by our side as we enter into the next phase of YHDP implementation and beyond.



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